



THE LETTERS OF
JOHN NEWTON



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The Letters of John Newton

"These letters are, according to the various circumstances of his correspondents — designed to guide and direct, to comfort, or, if need be, with all tenderness to reprove, while they often become the ardent effusions of Christian love towards those who formed the inner circle of his friends. They are full of wisdom and piety, rich in kindly feeling, written in easy flowing language, with many happy turns of expression, and often made striking by their simple yet ingenious illustrations."

- Josiah Bull, Author of "John Newton; an Autobiography and Narrative"

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The Benefits of Affliction

December, 1776

My dear Madam,

I have often preached to others of **the benefits of affliction**; but my own path for many years has been so smooth, and my trials, though I have not been without trials, comparatively so light and few—that I have seemed to myself to speak by *rote* upon a subject of which I had not a proper feeling. Yet the many exercises of my poor afflicted people, and the sympathy the Lord has given me with them in their troubles—has made "*the benefits of affliction*" a frequent and favorite topic of my ministry among them. The *advantages* of afflictions, when the Lord is pleased to employ them for the good of his people, are many and great. Permit me to mention a few of them; and may the Lord grant that we may all find those blessed ends answered to ourselves, by the trials he is pleased to appoint us.

Afflictions *quicken us to prayer*. It is a pity it should be so; but experience testifies, that a long course of ease and prosperity, without painful changes—has an unhappy tendency to make us cold and formal in our secret worship. But *troubles* rouse our spirits, and constrain us to call upon the Lord in good earnest—when we feel a need of that help which we only can have from his almighty arm.

Afflictions are useful, and in a degree necessary, to keep alive in us—a *conviction of the vanity and unsatisfying nature of the present world*, and all its enjoyments; to remind us that this world is not our rest, and to call our thoughts upwards, where our true treasure is, and where our heart ought to be. When things go on much to our wish, our hearts are too prone to say, "It is good to be here!" It is probable, that had Moses, when he came to invite Israel to Canaan, found them in prosperity—that they would have been very unwilling to move out of Egypt; but the afflictions they were in—made his message welcome. Thus the Lord, by pain, sickness, and disappointments, by breaking our cisterns and withering our gourds

—weakens our attachment to this world, and makes the thought of leaving it, more easy and more desirable.

A child of God cannot but greatly desire a more enlarged and *experimental acquaintance with his holy Word*; and this attainment is greatly promoted by our trials. The far greater part of the promises in Scripture, are made and suited to a state of affliction; and, though we may *believe* they are true, we cannot so well *know* their sweetness, power, and suitableness, unless we ourselves are in a state to which they refer! The Lord says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you." Now, until the day of trouble comes, such a promise is like a city of refuge to an Israelite, who, not having slain a man, was in no danger of the avenger of blood. He had a privilege near him, of which he knew not the use and value—because he was not in the case for which it was provided. But some can say, I not only believe this promise upon the authority of the speaker—but I can set my seal to it! I *have* been in trouble; I took this course for relief, and I was not disappointed. The Lord truly heard and delivered me. Thus afflictions likewise give occasion of our knowing and noticing more of the Lord's wisdom, power, and goodness, in supporting and relieving us—than we would otherwise have known.

I have not time to take another sheet, must therefore contract my homily.

Afflictions evidence to ourselves, and manifest to others, the *reality of grace*. When we suffer as Christians, exercise some measure of that patience and submission, and receive some measure of these supports and supplies, which the Gospel requires and promises to believers—we are more confirmed that we have not taken up with mere notions; and others may be convinced that we do not follow cunningly devised fables.

Afflictions likewise strengthen us—by the *exercise our graces*. As our limbs and natural powers would be feeble if not called to daily exertion—so the graces of the Spirit would languish, without something which was provided to draw them out to use.

Lastly, afflictions are honorable, as they *advance our conformity to Jesus our Lord*, who was a man of sorrows for our sake. Methinks, if we might go to heaven without suffering, we would be unwilling to desire it. Why should we ever wish to go by any other path to heaven—than that which Jesus has consecrated and endeared, by his own example? Especially as his people's sufferings are not *penal*—there is no wrath in them. The cup he puts in their hands is very different from that which he drank for their sakes, and is only *medicinal* to promote their chief good. Here I must stop; but the subject is fruitful, and might be pursued through a quire of paper.

"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons--My son, do not make light of **the Lord's discipline**, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however,

it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:5-11

Indwelling Sin and the Believer

by John Newton

1. What a believer would do — if he could

February, 1772.

I have been sitting, perhaps a quarter of an hour, with my pen in my hand, and my finger upon my upper lip, contriving how I should begin my letter. . . . At length my suspense reminded me of the apostle's words, Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. These are *contrary* the one to the other — so that ***you cannot do the things that you would!***" This is a humbling but a just account of a Christian's attainments in the present life, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less — the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given his people a desire and will aiming at great things; without this they would be unworthy the name of Christians; but they cannot do as they would. Their best desires are weak and ineffectual, not absolutely so (for He who works in them to will, enables them in a measure to do likewise) — but in comparison with the noble mark at which they aim. So that while they have great cause to be thankful for the *desire* He has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered — they have equal reason to be ashamed and abased under a sense of their continual defects, and the evil mixtures which taint and debase their best endeavors. It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars, which a believer would do if he could — but in which, from first to

last, he finds a mortifying inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

He would willingly enjoy God in **prayer**. He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in his judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honor and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven, that He should stoop so much lower, to afford his *gracious ear* to the *supplications of sinful worms* upon earth. He can bid them expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind and greater in degree than all that the world can afford. By prayer he can say, You have liberty to cast all your cares upon him who cares for you. By one hour's intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes his glory to pass before the soul that seeks him — you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort, than by a day or a week's converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many folios. And in this light he would consider it and improve it for himself. But, alas; how seldom can he do as he would! How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad of a just excuse to omit! and the chief pleasure he derives from the performance, is to think that his task is finished! He has been drawing near to God with his lips — while his heart was far from him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when (to borrow the expression of an old woman here,) he is dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief.

The like may be said of reading the **Scripture**. He believes it to be the Word of God: he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it *preferable* to

thousands of gold and silver, and *sweeter* than honey or the honeycomb! Yet, while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day — he cannot do as he would. It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged than when reading a newspaper. Here again his *privilege* frequently dwindles into a *task*. His appetite is vitiated — so that he has but little relish for the *food* of his soul.

He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the person and love of the Lord **Jesus** Christ. Glad he is, indeed, of those occasions which recall the Savior to his mind; and with this view, notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon the ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would. Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow-creatures — he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his *best Friend and Benefactor*. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting Him out of our thoughts, of whom we say: 'He is the Beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion!' What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could, we would set him always before us; his love should be the delightful theme of our hearts:

From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve!

But though we *aim* at this good — evil is present with us: we find we are renewed but in part, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, to take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.

He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of divine **Providence**. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of

God, and the good of those who fear him. He has no doubts that the hairs of his head are all numbered, that the blessings of every kind which he possesses, were *bestowed* upon him, and are preserved to him — by the bounty and special favor of the Lord whom he serves! He fully believes that afflictions do not spring out of the ground — but are fruits and tokens of Divine love, no less than his comforts! He is sure that there is a need-be, whenever for a season he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt, than of what he sees with his eyes; and there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials.

But often when he aims to *apply* them in an hour of present distress — he cannot do what he would! He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not — he is ready to complain, murmur, and despond! Alas! how vain is man in his best estate! How much weakness and inconsistency, even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! and what reason have we to confess that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants!

It were easy to enlarge in this way — would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God, we are not under the law — but under grace! And even these distressing effects of the remnants of indwelling sin are overruled for good. By these experiences — the believer is weaned more from SELF, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely to rely on Him, who is our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption! The more vile we are in our own eyes — the more precious He will be to us! A deep repeated sense of the evil of our hearts — is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation where it is due!

Again, a sense of these evils will (when hardly anything else can do it) reconcile us to the thoughts of DEATH! Yes, they make us desirous to depart that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep-rooted in our nature, that, like the leprous house, the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement!

Then, and not until then — we shall be able to do the thing that we would! When we see Jesus — we shall be transformed into His image, and be done with sin and sorrow forever!

2. The evil a believer would *not* do — if he could.

March, 1772.

I think my last letter turned upon the apostle's thought, Galatians 5:17, "*You cannot do the things that you would.*" In the parallel place, Romans 7:19, there is another clause subjoined, "*The evil which I would not do — that I do.*" This, added to the former, would complete the dark side of my experience. Permit me to tell your lordship a little part, (for some things must not, cannot be told,) not of what I have read — but of what I have *felt*, in illustration of this passage.

I would not be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and vile imaginations; but this evil is present with me! My heart is like an open highway — like a city without walls or gates. Nothing so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid — but it can obtain access, and that at any time, or in any place! Neither the study, the pulpit, nor even the Lord's table — exempt me from their intrusion.

But if this awful effect of heart-depravity cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature — yet, at least, I would not allow and indulge it; yet this I find I do. In defiance of my best judgment and best wishes, I find something within me, which cherishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to be horrified by, and flee from — as I would if a toad or a serpent was put in my food or in my bed. Ah! how vile must the heart (at least my heart) be, that can hold a parley with such abominations, when I so well know their nature and their tendency. Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, without the least affectation of humility (however fair his outward conduct appears), subscribe himself less than the least of all saints, and the very chief of sinners!

I would not be influenced by a principle of *SELF* on any occasion; yet this evil I often do. I see the baseness and absurdity of such a conduct — as clearly as I see the light of the day. I do not affect to be thought ten feet high — and I know that a desire of being *thought wise or good*, is equally contrary to reason and truth. I would be grieved or angry if my fellow-creatures *supposed* I had such a desire! And therefore, I fear the very principle of *SELF*, of which I complain, has a considerable share in prompting my desires to conceal it. The pride of others often offends me, and makes me studious to hide my own; because their good opinion of me — depends much upon their not perceiving it. But the Lord knows how this dead fly taints and spoils my *best services*, and makes them no better than splendid sins.

I would not indulge vain reasonings concerning the counsels, ways, and *providences* of God; yet I am prone to do it! That the Judge of all the earth will do right, is to me as evident and necessary as that *two plus two make four*. I believe that He has a sovereign right to do what He will with his own, and that this *sovereignty* is but another

name for the *unlimited exercise of wisdom and goodness*. But my reasonings are often such, as if I had never heard of these principles, or had formally renounced them! I feel the workings of a presumptuous spirit, that would account for every thing — and venture to dispute whatever it cannot comprehend. What an evil is this, for a potsherd of the earth to contend with its Maker! I do not act thus towards my fellow-creatures; I do not find fault with the decisions of a judge, or the dispositions of a general, because, though I know they are fallible — yet I suppose they are wiser in their respective departments than myself. But I am often ready to take this liberty when it is most unreasonable and inexcusable.

I would not cleave to a *covenant of works*. It would seem from the foregoing particulars, and many others which I could mention, that I have reasons enough to deter me from this. Yet even this I do. Not but that I say, and I hope from my heart, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord." I embrace it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save *sinner*s; and it is the main pleasure and business of my life, to set forth the necessity and all sufficiency of the Mediator between God and Man, and to make mention of his righteousness, even of his alone. But here, as in everything else, I find a vast difference between my *judgment* and my *experience*.

I am invited to take the water of life *freely* — yet often discouraged, because I have nothing with which to *pay* for it. If I am at times favored with some liberty from the above-mentioned evils, it rather gives me a more favorable opinion of myself, than increases my admiration of the Lord's goodness to so unworthy a creature; and when the returning tide of my corruptions convinces me that I am still the same — an unbelieving legal spirit would urge me to conclude that the Lord is changed. At least I feel a *weariness* of being

indebted to him for such continued multiplied forgiveness. And I fear that some part of my striving against sin, and my desires after an increase of sanctification, arise from a secret wish that I might *not* be so absolutely and entirely indebted to him.

This, my lord, is only a faint sketch of my depraved heart; but it is taken from the life! It would require a volume rather than a letter, to fill up the outlines. But I believe you will not regret that I choose to say no more upon such a subject. But though my disease is grievous, it is not desperate; I have a gracious and infallible Physician. I shall not die — but live, and declare the works of the Lord.

3. The existence of indwelling sin overruled for good.

April, 1772.

My two last letters turned upon a mournful subject — the *depravity of the heart* — which impedes us when we would do good, and pollutes our best intended services with evil. We have cause, upon this account, to walk softly all our days; yet we need not sorrow as those who have no hope. The Lord has provided his people relief under those complaints, and teaches us to draw improvement from them. If the evils we feel were not capable of being overruled for good — He would not permit them to remain in us. This we may infer from his hatred to sin — and the love which He bears to his people.

As to the *remedy*, neither *our state* nor *his honor* are affected by the workings of indwelling sin — in the hearts of those whom He has taught to wrestle, strive, and mourn, on account of what they feel. Though sin wars in us — it shall not reign in us. And though it breaks our peace — it cannot separate from his love. Nor is it inconsistent with his holiness, and perfection, to manifest his favor to such poor

defiled creatures, or to admit them to communion with himself; for they are not considered as in themselves — but as one with Jesus, to whom they have fled for refuge, and by whom they live a life of faith.

They are accepted in the Beloved. They act from a *principle* of love. They *aim* at no less than his glory. Their habitual desires are supremely fixed upon himself. There is a difference in kind between the feeblest efforts of faith in a real believer, while he is covered with shame at the thoughts of his sins — and the highest and most splendid attainments of those who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight.

Nor shall this conflict remain long, or the enemy finally prevail over them. They are supported by almighty power — and led on to certain victory. They shall not always be — as they are now; yet a little while, and they shall be freed from this vile body, which, like the leprous house, is incurably contaminated, and must be entirely taken down. Then they shall see Jesus as He is, and be like him, and with him forever.

The gracious purposes to which the Lord makes the sense and feeling of our depravity subservient, are manifold. Hereby his own power, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, are more signally displayed.

His **power** is displayed — in *maintaining* his own work in the midst of so much opposition, like a spark burning in the water, or a bush unconsumed in the flames.

His **wisdom** is displayed — in defeating and controlling all the devices which Satan, from his knowledge of the evil of our nature, is encouraged to practice against us. He has overthrown many a fair *professor*, and, like Goliath, he challenges the whole army of Israel; yet he finds that there are some against whom, though he thrusts

sorely, he cannot prevail. Notwithstanding any seeming advantage he gains at some seasons — they are still delivered, for the Lord is on their side.

The unchangeableness of the Lord's **love**, and the riches of his mercy, are likewise more illustrated by the *multiplied pardons* He bestows upon his people — than if they needed no forgiveness at all.

Hereby the Lord **Jesus** Christ is more endeared to the soul; all boasting is effectually excluded, and the glory of a full and free salvation is ascribed to him alone.

The righteous are said to be *scarcely* saved, not with respect to the *certainty* of the event, for the purpose of God in their favor cannot be disappointed — but in respect of their *own apprehensions*, and the great *difficulties* they are brought through. But when, after a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, wilfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility — they find that none of these things can separate them from the love of God in Christ; Jesus becomes more and more precious to their souls. They love much, because much has been forgiven them!

They dare not, they will not ascribe anything to themselves — but are glad to acknowledge, that they must have perished a thousand times over — if Jesus had not been their Savior, their Shepherd, and their Shield! When they were wandering — He brought them back. When they were fallen — He raised them. When they were wounded — He healed them. When they were fainting — He revived them. By him, out of weakness, they have been made strong. He has taught their hands to battle, and covered their heads in the day of battle. In a word, some of the clearest proofs they have had of *his excellence* — have been occasioned by the mortifying proofs they have had of *their*

own vileness. They would not have known so much of *him* — if they had not known so much of *themselves*!

Further, a spirit of *humiliation*, which is both the strength and beauty of our profession — is greatly promoted by our feeling, as well as reading — that *when we would do good — evil is present with us*. A broken and contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord. He has promised to dwell with those who have it; and experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature.

Whoever is truly humbled — will not be easily angry, nor harsh or critical of others. He will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow-sinners, knowing that if there is a difference — it is grace alone which has made it! He knows that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart. And under all trials and afflictions — he will look to the hand of the Lord, and lay his mouth in the dust, acknowledging that he suffers much less than his iniquities have deserved.

These are some of the *advantages* and *good fruits* which the Lord enables us to obtain from that *bitter root* — indwelling sin.

Christian Liberty

by John Newton to the Earl of Dartmouth

November, 1776.

My London journey, which prevented my writing in October, made me amends by an opportunity of waiting upon your lordship in person. Such seasons are not only pleasant at the time — but afford

me pleasure in the review. I could have wished the half hour we were together by ourselves, prolonged to half a day. The subject your lordship was pleased to suggest has been often upon my mind; and glad should I be, were I able to offer you anything satisfactory upon it.

There is no doubt but *first religious impressions* are usually mingled with much of a *legal spirit*, and that conscience at such a time is not only *tender* — but *misinformed* and *scrupulous*. And I believe, as your lordship intimated, that when the mind is more enlightened, and we feel a liberty from many *fetters* we had imposed upon ourselves — we are in danger of verging too far towards the other extreme.

It seems to me that no one person can adjust the medium, and draw the line exactly for *another*. There are so many *particulars* in every situation, of which a stranger cannot be a competent judge, and the best human advices and models are mixed with such defects — that it is not right to expect others to be absolutely guided by *our* rules. Nor is it safe for us implicitly to adopt the decisions or practices of others.

But the Scripture undoubtedly furnishes sufficient and infallible rules for every person, however circumstanced; and the throne of grace is appointed for us to wait upon the Lord for the best exposition of his precepts. Thus David often prays to be *led* in the right way — in the path of judgment. By frequent *prayer*, and close acquaintance with the Scripture, and a habitual attention to the frame of our *hearts* — there is a certain *delicacy of spiritual taste and discernment* to be acquired, which renders a nice disquisition concerning the nature and limits of the *Adiaphora*, as they are called — or how near we may go the utmost bounds of what is right, without being wrong, quite unnecessary. Love is the clearest and

most persuasive indicator: and when our love to the Lord is in lively exercise, and the rule of his Word is in our eye — we seldom make great mistakes.

From the time we know the Lord, and are bound to him by the cords of love and gratitude — the two chief points we should have in our view, I apprehend, are, to maintain communion with him in our own souls, and to glorify him in the sight of men. Agreeably to these views, though the Scripture does not enumerate or decide in so many words, for or against many things which some plead for, and others condemn — yet it furnishes us with some general guidelines, which, if rightly applied, will perhaps go a good way towards settling the debate, at least to the satisfaction of those who would rather please God than man.

Some of these canons I will just remark to your lordship; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 8:13, and 10:31; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 4:30, and 5:11, 15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Ephesians 6:18; to which I may add, as suitable to the present times, Isaiah 22:12; Luke 21:34. I apprehend the spirit of these and similar passages of Scripture (for it would be easy to adduce a larger number,) will bring a Christian under such restrictions as follow.

1. To avoid and forbear, for his own sake, from whatever has a tendency to damp and indispose his spirit in attendance upon the means of grace; for such things, if they are not condemned as *sinful* per se, if they are not absolutely unlawful, yes though they are, when duly regulated, lawful and right, (for often our *chief snares* are entwined with our *blessings*,) yet if they have a repeated and evident tendency to *deaden our hearts to divine things*, of which each person's experience must determine — then there must be something in them, either in season, measure, or circumstance — wrong to US.

And let them promise what they will, they do but rob us of our *gold* — to pay us with *trinkets*. For the light of God's countenance, and an open cheerfulness of spirit in walking with him in private, is our chief joy; and we must be already greatly hurt, if anything can be pursued, allowed, or rested in — as a tolerable substitute for it.

2. For the sake of the *church*, and the influence which *example* may have upon his fellow Christians — the law of charity and prudence will often require a believer to abstain from some things, not because they are *unlawful* — but *inexpedient*. Thus the apostle, though strenuous for the right of his Christian liberty, would have abridged himself of the *use*, so as to eat no meat — rather than offend a weak brother, rather than mislead him to act against the present light of his conscience.

Upon this principle, if I could, without hurt to myself, attend some *popular amusements* — and return thence with a warm heart to my prayer closet, (the possibility of which in my own case I greatly question,) yet I should think it my duty to forbear, lest some weaker than myself should be encouraged by me to make the like experiment, though in their own minds they might fear it was wrong, and have no other reason to think it lawful, but because I did it; in which case I would suspect, that though *I* received no harm — *they* would.

I have known and conversed with some who, I fear, have made shipwreck of their profession, who have dated their first decline from *imitating others*, whom they thought wiser and better than themselves, in such kind of compliances. And it seems that an obligation to this sort of *self-denial* rises and is strengthened and proportioned to the weight and *influence* of our characters. Were I in private life, I do not know that I should think it sinful to *hunt*

partridge or a rabbits; but, as a minister, I no more dare do it than I dare join in a drunken frolic, because I know it would give offence to some, and be pleaded for as a license by others.

3. There is a duty and a charity likewise, which we owe to the world at large, as well as a faithfulness to God and his grace — in our necessary converse among them. This seems to require, that though we should not be needlessly *singular* — yet, for their instruction, and for the honor of our Lord and Master, we should keep up a certain kind of *singularity*, and show ourselves called to be a *separated* people; that, though the providence of God has given us callings and relations to fill up, (in which we cannot be too exact,) yet we are not *of the world* — but belong to another community, and act from other principles, by other rules, and to other ends — than the generality of those about us.

I have observed, that the world will often leave professors in quiet possession of their notions and sentiments, and places of worship — provided they will not be too stiff in the matter of conformity with their more general customs and amusements. But I fear many of them have had their prejudices strengthened against our holy religion by such *compliances*, and have thought, that if there were such joy and comfort to be found in the ways of God as they hear from our pulpits — then professors would not, in such numbers, and so often run among them, to beg a relief, from the burden of *time* hanging upon their hands.

Providential and necessary *calls of duty*, that lead us into the world, will not hurt us — if we find the spirit of the world unpleasant, and are glad to retire from it, and keep out of it as much as our relative duties will permit. That which is our *cross* — is not so likely to be our *snare*. But if that spirit, which we should always watch and pray

against, infects and assimilates our minds to itself, then we are sure to suffer loss, and act below the dignity of our profession.

Upon the whole, it appears to me, that it is more honorable, comfortable, and safe, (if we cannot exactly hit the golden mean,) to be thought by some *too scrupulous and precise* — than actually to be found too compliant with those things which, if not absolutely contrary to a divine commandment, are hardly compatible with the tenor of the gospel, or conformable to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, which ought also to be in his people.

The places and amusements which the world frequent and admire, where occasions and temptations to sin are cultivated, where sinful passions are provoked and indulged, where the fear of God is so little known or regarded, that those who do fear him must hold their tongues, though they should hear his name blasphemed, can hardly be a Christian's *voluntary* chosen ground. Yet I fear these characters will apply to every kind of amusement in the nation.

As to *family* connections, I cannot think we are bound to break or slight them. But as believers and their relatives often live as it were in *two elements* — there is a *mutual awkwardness*, which makes their interactions rather dry and tedious. But upon that account they are less frequent than they would otherwise be, which seems an advantage. Both sides keep up returns of *civility* and *affection*; but as they cannot unite in sentiment and leading inclination, they will not contrive to be very often together, except there is something considerable given up by one or the other. I think Christians ought to be very cautious what *concessions* they make upon this account. But, as I said at the beginning, no general positive rules can be laid down.

I have simply given your lordship such thoughts as have occurred to me while writing, without study, and without coherence. I dare not

be dogmatic; but I think what I have written is agreeable both to particular texts and to the *general tenor of Scripture*. I submit it to your judgment.

A Guide to Godly Disputation

by John Newton

Dear Sir,

As you are likely to be engaged in **controversy**, and your love of truth is joined with natural warmth of temper, my friendship makes me solicitous on your behalf. You are of the strongest side; for truth is great, and must prevail; so that a person of abilities inferior to yours might take the field with a confidence of victory. I am not therefore anxious for the outcome of the battle; but I would have you more than a conqueror, and to triumph, not only over your *adversary*, but also over *yourself*. If you cannot be *vanquished*, you may be *wounded*. To preserve you from such wounds as might give you cause of weeping over your conquests, I would present you with some considerations, which, if duly attended to, will do you the service of a great coat of armor; such armor, that you need not complain, as David did of Saul's, that it will be more cumbersome than useful; for you will easily perceive that it is taken from that great armory provided for the Christian soldier—the Word of God. I take it for granted that you will not expect any apology for my freedom, and therefore I shall not offer one. For methods sake, I may reduce my advice to three heads, respecting your **opponent**, the **public**, and **yourself**.

1. As to your **opponent**, I wish that before you set pen to paper against him, and during the whole time you are preparing your answer, you may commend him by *earnest prayer* to the Lord's teaching and blessing. This practice will have a direct tendency to *conciliate your heart to love and pity him*; and such a disposition will have a good influence upon every page you write.

If you account him as a BELIEVER, though greatly *mistaken* in the subject of debate between you, the words of David to Joab concerning Absalom, are very applicable: "Deal gently with him for my sake." The *Lord* loves him and bears with him; therefore *you* must not despise him, or treat him harshly! The Lord bears with you likewise, and expects that you should show *tenderness* to others—from a sense of the much forgiveness you need yourself. In a little while you will meet in heaven—he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now! Anticipate that period in your thoughts, and though you may find it necessary to oppose his *errors*, view him personally as a kindred soul, with whom you are to be happy in Christ forever.

But if you look upon him as an UNCONVERTED person, in a state of enmity against God and his grace (a supposition which, without good evidence, you should be very unwilling to admit), he is a more proper object of your *compassion* than of your *anger*! Alas! "He knows not what he does!" But you know *who* has made you to differ from him. If God, in his sovereign pleasure, had so appointed, *you* might have been as he is now; and he, instead of you, might have been set for the defense of the gospel! You were *both* equally blind by nature. If you attend to this, you will not reproach or hate him, because the Lord has been pleased to open *your* eyes—and not *his*!

Of all people who engage in controversy, we, who are called *Calvinists*, are most expressly bound by our own principles, to the exercise of *gentleness* and compassion. If, indeed, those who differ from us have a power of changing themselves, if they can open their own eyes, and soften their own hearts—then we might with less inconsistency be *offended* at their obstinacy! But if we believe the very contrary to this, our part is not to *argue*, but in meekness to "gently teach those who oppose the truth—if perhaps *God* will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth."

If you write with a desire of being an instrument of correcting mistakes, you will of course be cautious of laying *stumbling blocks* in the way of the blind, or of using any expressions which may exasperate their passions, or confirm them in their false principles, (humanly speaking).

2. By *PRINTING* your article, you will appeal to the **PUBLIC**—where your readers may be ranged under three divisions:

First, such as **differ** from you in principle. Concerning these I may refer you to what I have already said. Though you have your eye upon one person chiefly—there are *many* like-minded with him; and the same reasoning will hold, whether as to one or to a million.

There will be likewise many who pay too **little regard** to true religion, who have no settled system of their own, and yet are biased in favor of those sentiments which are at least repugnant to the good opinion they naturally have of themselves. These are very incompetent judges of doctrine; but they can form a tolerable judgment of a *writer's spirit*. They know that meekness, humility and love are the characteristics of a Christian temper. And though they treat the *doctrines of grace* as mere notions and speculations, which, supposing they adopted them, would have no beneficial

influence upon their conduct; yet from us, who profess these principles, they always expect such attitudes and dispositions as correspond with the precepts of the gospel. They are quick-sighted to discern when we deviate from such a spirit, and avail themselves of it to justify their contempt of our arguments.

The Scriptural maxim that "man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires," is verified by daily observation. If our zeal is embittered by expressions of anger, invective, or scorn—we may think we are doing *service* of the cause of truth, when in reality we shall only bring it into *discredit!* The weapons of our warfare, and which alone are powerful to break down the strongholds of error, are not carnal, but spiritual. They are arguments fairly drawn from Scripture and experience, and enforced by such a mild address, as may persuade our readers, that, whether we can convince them or not—we wish well to their souls, and contend only for the truth's sake. If we can satisfy them that we act upon these motives, our point is half gained; they will be more disposed to consider calmly what we offer; and if they should still dissent from our opinions, they will be constrained to approve *our intentions*.

You will have a third class of readers, who being of **your own sentiments**, will readily approve of what you advance, and may be further established and confirmed in their views of the Scripture doctrines, by a clear and masterly elucidation of your subject. You may be instrumental to their edification, if the law of *kindness* as well as of *truth* regulates your pen; otherwise you may do them harm.

There is a principle of *SELF*, which disposes us to *despise* those who differ from us; and we are often under its influence, when we think

we are only showing a fitting zeal in the cause of God.

I readily believe that the leading points of *Arminianism* spring from and are nourished by the *pride of the human heart!* But I would be glad if the reverse were always true; and that to embrace what are called the *Calvinistic doctrines* was an infallible token of a *humble mind!* I think I have known some *Arminians*, that is, people who for lack of a clearer light, have been afraid of receiving the *doctrines of free grace*, who yet have given evidence that their *hearts* were in a degree humbled before the Lord. And I am afraid there are *Calvinists*, who, while they account it a proof of their humility, that they are willing *in words* to debase the creature and to give all the glory of salvation to the Lord—yet are of a prideful, harsh and bitter spirit. Whatever it is that makes us trust in ourselves, that we are comparatively wise or good, so as to treat those with *contempt* who do not subscribe to our doctrines, or follow our party—is a proof and fruit of a *self-righteous* spirit!

Self-righteousness can feed upon *doctrines*—as well as upon *works!* A man may have the *heart* of a Pharisee, while his *head* is stored with orthodox notions of the unworthiness of the creature, and the riches of free grace!

Yes, I would add—the *best* of men are not wholly free from this leaven; and therefore are too apt to be pleased with such caricatures as hold up our adversaries to ridicule—and by consequence flatter our own superior judgments. Controversies, for the most part, are so managed as to *indulge*—rather than to *repress* this sinful disposition; and therefore, generally speaking, they are productive of little good. They *provoke* those whom they should convince—and *puff up* those whom they should edify!

I hope your article will savor of a spirit of *true humility*, and be a means of promoting it in others.

3. This leads me, in the last place, to consider **your own concern** in your present undertaking. It seems a laudable service to *defend the faith once delivered to the saints*; we are commanded to *contend earnestly* for it, and to convince gainsayers. If ever such defenses were seasonable and expedient, they appear to be so in our own day, when *errors* abound on all sides—and every *truth* of the gospel is either directly denied or grossly misrepresented.

And yet we find but very few *writers of controversy* who have not been manifestly hurt by it. Either they grow in a sense of their own importance; or imbibe an angry, contentious spirit; or they insensibly withdraw their attention from those spiritual truths which are the food and immediate support of the life of faith—and spend their time and strength upon matters that are at most but of a secondary value! This shows, that if the service is *honorable*, it is also *dangerous*. What will it profit a man if he gains his cause and silences his adversary—if at the same time he loses that humble, tender frame of spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of his presence is made?

Your aim, I doubt not, is good, but you have need to watch and pray—for you will find Satan at your right hand to entice you. He will try to pollute your piety; and though you set out in defense of the cause of God, if you are not continually looking to the Lord to keep you—it may become *your own* cause, and awaken in you those *tempers* which are inconsistent with true peace of mind, and will surely obstruct your communion with God! Be upon your guard against admitting anything *personal* into the debate. If you think you have been ill treated—this will give you an opportunity of showing that

you are a disciple of Jesus, who "when reviled—He did not revile in return; when suffering—He did not threaten, but committed Himself to the One who judges justly." This is *our pattern*, thus we are to speak and write for God, and "not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult—but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this."

The wisdom that is from above, is not only *pure*, but also *peaceable* and *gentle*; and the lack of these qualifications, like *the dead fly in the jar of ointment*, will spoil the fragrance and efficacy of our labors. If we act in a wrong spirit—we shall bring little glory to God; do little good to our fellow creatures; and procure neither honor nor comfort to ourselves! If you can be content with *showing your wit*, and gaining the *laugh* on your side—you have an easy task!

But I hope you have a far nobler aim; and that, sensible of the solemn importance of gospel truths, and the compassion due to the souls of men, you would rather be a means of *removing prejudices* in a single instance, than obtain the *empty applause of thousands!* Go forth, therefore, in the name and strength of the Lord Almighty, *speaking the truth in love*; and may he give you a witness in many hearts that you are taught of God, and favored with the unction of his Holy Spirit!

**The Imminent *Danger* and the Only
Sure *Resource* of this Nation**

by John Newton, February 28, 1794,
the day appointed for the *national fast*

"Come, let us return to the Lord! He has torn us in pieces; now He will heal us. He has injured us; now He will bandage our wounds!"
Hosea 6:1

"Who can tell? God may turn and relent; He may turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish!" Jonah 3:9

How great is the power of God over the hearts of men! Nineveh was the capital of a powerful empire. The inhabitants were Heathen. The many prophets who, during a long series of years, had spoken in the name of the Lord to his professed people of Judah and Israel, had spoken almost in vain. The messengers were often mocked, and their message despised. The inhabitants of Nineveh, it is probable, had never seen a true prophet until Jonah was sent to them. If they had reasoned on his prediction, they might have thought it very improbable, that a great city, the head of a great kingdom, and in a time of peace, could be in danger of an overthrow within forty days. But it is said, "they believed God." (Jonah 3:5) The awful denunciation made a general, a universal impression. The king arose from his throne, laid aside his robes, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. A sudden cessation of business and of pleasure took place; he proclaimed a strict fast, the rigor of which was extended even to the cattle. His subjects readily complied, and unanimously concurred in crying for mercy: though they had no encouragement but a 'perhaps', "Who can tell? God may turn and relent; He may turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish!"

It appears from this, and other passages of Scripture, that *the most express declarations of God's displeasure against sinners, still afford ground and room for repentance.* Thus, in the prophecy of

Ezekiel, "So when I tell the wicked person: You will surely die, but he repents of his sin and does what is just and right—he will certainly live; he will not die." (Ezekiel 33:14-15) and again, in the prophecy of Jeremiah, "At one moment I might announce concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will uproot, tear down, and destroy it. However, if that nation I have made an announcement about, turns from its evil, I will not bring the disaster on it I had planned." (Jer. 18:7-8)

The Lord God speaks to us by his Word, in plain and popular language. He condescends to our feeble apprehensions. God cannot *repent*, he is of one mind who can turn him? (Num. 23:19, Job 23:13) Yet, when afflictive providences lead men to a sense of their sins, to an acknowledgment of their demerits, and excite a spirit of humiliation, repentance, and prayer, he often mercifully changes his dispensations, and averts from them the impending evil. Such was the effect of Jonah's message to the Ninevites. The people humbled themselves, and repented of their wickedness; and God suspended the execution of the sentence which he had pronounced against them.

My brethren, may we not fear, that the men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us, (Mat. 12:41) if we do not imitate their example, and humble ourselves before God? They repented at the preaching of Jonah, and immediately, on their first hearing him; and they sought for mercy upon a perhaps, when they could say no more, than, *Who can tell*, whether there may be the least room to hope for it, after what the prophet has so solemnly declared?

God does not speak to us by the audible voice of an inspired prophet; nor is it necessary. We know, or may know, from his written Word, that it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked (Isaiah

3:10-11) The appearance of an angel from heaven could add nothing to the certainty of the declarations he has already put into our hands. He has likewise raised up, and perpetuated a succession of his ministers, to enforce the warnings he has given us in the Scripture; to remind us of our sins, and the sure and dreadful consequences, if we persist in them. Nor are we left at an uncertainty as to the outcome, if we humbly confess them, and implore forgiveness, in the way which he has prescribed. The Gospel, the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, is preached unto us. Jesus Christ, as crucified, is set forth among us. (Galatians 3:1, 1 Jo. 1:7, Romans 8:1, Acts 13:39) His blood cleanses from all sin; and those who believe in him are freed from condemnation, and completely justified. They have also free access to a throne of grace, and, like Israel, they have power, by prayer, to prevail with God and with man. (Genesis 32:28) And shall it be said of any of us, that the Lord gave us space to repent, and invited us to repentance, and we repented not? (Revelation 2:21) May his mercy forbid it!

He now speaks to us by his *providence*. His judgments are abroad in the earth; and it behooves us to learn righteousness. (Isaiah 25:9-11) His hand is lifted up, and if any are so careless, or obstinate, that they will not see, yet, sooner or later, they must, they shall see. The *great God* has a controversy with the *potsherd*s of the earth. The point to be decided between him and many abroad, and, I fear, too many at home, is, whether he is the Governor of the earth or not? His own people, to whom His name and glory are dear, will hold all inferior concernment in subordination to this. If there is no other alternative, misery and havoc must spread, men must perish by millions, yes, the frame of nature must be dissolved, rather than God be dishonored and defied with impunity. But he will surely plead and gain his own cause, and, either in a way of judgment or of mercy, all men shall know that he is the Lord. I believe there is no expression in

the Old Testament so frequently repeated as this, "You," or they, "shall know that I am the Lord! Has he said it, and shall he not make it good?" (Ezekiel, *passim*)

The rivers of human blood, and all the calamities and horrors which overspread a great part of the Continent, the distant report of which is sufficient to make our ears tingle, are all to be ascribed to this cause. God is not acknowledged; yes, in some places, he has been formally disowned and renounced. Therefore, God sometimes leaves men left to themselves—their furious passions are unchained, and they are given up, without restraint, to the lusts of their own evil hearts! A more dreadful judgment than this, cannot be inflicted on this side of hell. "Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!" Hosea 4:17

And, though we are still favored with peace at home, the dreadful storm is at no great distance; it seems to be moving our way, and we have reason to fear that it may burst upon us. But I would be thankful for the appointment of this day; for I should think the prospect dark indeed, if I did not rely on the Lord's gracious attention to the united prayers of those who fear and trust him, and who know it is equally easy to him either to save or to destroy, by many or by few. (1 Samuel 14:6) Our fleets and armies may be well appointed and well commanded; but, without his blessing upon our councils and enterprises, they will be unable to defend us. He can take wisdom from the wise, and courage from the bold, in the moment when they are most needful. He can disable our forces by sickness or dissension; and, by his mighty wind, he can dash our ships to pieces against the rocks, against each other, or sink them like lead in the mighty waters! "Who is there who speaks and it happens—unless the Lord has ordained it?" Lamentations 3:37

Our Lord and Savior, when speaking of the eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them, said to the Jews, "Those 18 that the tower in Siloam fell on and killed—do you think they were more sinful than all the people who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you will all perish as well!" Luke 13:4-5. May the application of these words sink deeply into our hearts! It will not befit us to say, either to God or man, that '*we have indeed sinned—but there are greater sinners than ourselves.*' It is true, the French Convention, and many others who are infatuated by the same spirit, have exceeded the ordinary standard of human impiety and cruelty. But I hope there are multitudes in that nation, who, though they are overawed by their oppressors, and dare not speak their sentiments, yet are mourning in secrecy and silence, for the abominations which they cannot prevent. But the French have *not* sinned against such *advantages* as we possess. They were long the *slaves of despotic power*, and the *dupes of superstition*; and of late they have been the dupes of *fools*, assuming the name of *philosophers*.

We, on the contrary, were born and educated in a land distinguished from all the nations of the earth, by the eminent degree in which we enjoy civil and religious liberty, and the light of gospel truth. These privileges exceedingly aggravate our sins; and no just comparison, in this respect, can be formed between us and other nations, until we can find a people who have been equally favored, for an equal length of time, by the providence of God—and have likewise equaled us in disobedience and ingratitude!

The most dreadful enormities committed in France, are no more than *specimens of what human depravity is capable of*—when circumstances admit of its full exertion, and when the usual boundaries and restrictions necessary to the peace and welfare of civil society, are judicially removed. The influence of *daring*

infidelity and *profligate example*, aided by the peculiar state of their public affairs, have broken, in many instances, the strongest ties of social and relative life, and extinguished the common feelings of humanity!

Yet the unhappy French, though our inveterate enemies, are not the proper objects of our *hatred* or our *scorn*—but rather of our *pity*. They know not what they do! Let us *pray* for them. Who can tell but God, to whom all things are possible, and whose mercies are higher than the heavens, may grant also them repentance! And let us pray for ourselves, that we may be instructed and warned by their history—for, by nature, *we are no better than they!*

I. But it is time to attend more immediately to our own concerns. The professed purpose of our meeting today, is to "humble ourselves before Almighty God, and to send up our prayers and supplications to the Divine Majesty, for obtaining pardon of our sins, and for averting those heavy judgments which our manifold sins have most justly deserved; and imploring His blessing and assistance on our military, and for restoring and perpetuating peace, safety, and prosperity to himself and to his kingdoms." I hope these expressions accord with the language and desire of our hearts.

Oh! for a glance of what Isaiah saw, and has described! "In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord! He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of His robe filled the Temple. Hovering around Him were mighty seraphim, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with the remaining two they flew. In a great chorus they sang, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty! The whole earth is filled with His glory!' The glorious singing shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire sanctuary was filled with smoke! Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I

am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!" Isaiah 6:1-5

Oh! that we, by the power of that faith, could behold the glory of the Lord filling this house; that we could realize the presence and the attitude of His attendant angels! They cover their faces and their feet with their wings, as overpowered by the beams of His majesty; and conscious, if not of defilement like us, yet of unavoidable inability as creatures, to render Him the whole of that praise and homage which are justly due to Him!

Oh! that, by faith, we could enter into the spirit of their ascription —'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is filled with His glory!' If we were all thus affected, as the prophet was, surely each one for himself would adopt the prophet's language. Or, if a comfortable hope in the Gospel prevented us from crying out, "Woe is me, for I am ruined!" we should, at least, say, (the Hebrew word might be so rendered,) "I am silenced, I am struck dumb! I am overwhelmed with confusion and shame; for I am a man of unclean lips myself, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!"

If we have a degree of this impression, we shall not perplex ourselves concerning the second causes, or immediate instruments of our calamities. The evil of sin, contrasted with the holiness and glory of God, will engross our thoughts! And we shall ascribe all the troubles we either feel or fear—to our own sins, and the sins of those among whom we dwell.

1. Let us first look at OURSELVES. *"I am a man of unclean lips! I am a sinner!"* This confession suits us all, and is readily made by all who know themselves. A person approaching London from the

neighboring hills, usually sees it obscured by a *cloud of smoke*. This *cloud of smoke* is the aggregate of the smoke, to which every house furnishes its respective quota. This *cloud of smoke* is a fit emblem of the sin and the misery which abound in this great metropolis! The Lord said of the Amorites, at a certain period, "Their iniquity is not yet full." (Genesis 15:16) I hope the measure of our iniquity is not yet full; but it is filling more every day, and we are all daily contributing to fill it.

True believers, though, by grace, delivered from the reigning power of sin, are still sinners. (Romans 6:14) In many things, we all sin in thought, word, and deed. We are now called upon to humble ourselves before God, for the sins of our *ignorance*, and for the more aggravated sins we have committed *against light* and experience; for those *personal sins*, the record of which is known only to God and our consciences; for the *defects* and *defilements* of our best services; for our great and *manifold failures* in the discharge of our relative duties, as parents, children, husbands, wives, masters, or servants, and as members of the community. Our dullness in the ways of God, our alertness in the pursuit of our own will and way; our indifference to what concerns *his glory*, as compared with the quickness of our concerns, when our own *temporal interests* are affected, are so many proofs of our ingratitude and depravity! The sins of *the Lord's own people* are so many, and so heightened by the consideration of his known goodness, that, if he was to enter into judgment with *them alone*, they could offer no other plea than that which he has mercifully provided for them, "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared!" (Psalm 130:3-4)

2. It is easy to declaim against the wickedness of the times. But only they who are duly affected with the multitude and magnitude of their

own sins can be competent judges of what the prophet meant or felt, when he said, "*I live among a people of unclean lips.*" We ought to be no less concerned (though in a different manner) for the **sins of those among whom we dwell**, than for our own. We shall be so, if, with the eyes of our mind—we behold the King, the Lord Almighty; because his glory, which should be the dearest object to our hearts, is dishonored by them.

I think this nation might be considered as the *Israel of the New Testament*, both with respect of his goodness to us, and our perverse returns to him. He has been pleased to select us, as a special people, and to show among us such instances of his protection, his favor, his grace, and his patience—as cannot be paralleled in the annals of any other nation!

We have no certain account when the name of Jesus the Savior was first known in England; it was, probably, at an early period of the Christian area. But we do know, that after the *long dark night of superstition and ignorance* which covered Christendom for many ages—the *dawn of returning gospel light* was first seen among us! From the time of *Wickliffe*, the morning-star of the Reformation, the true Gospel has been known, preached, received, and perpetuated to this day. There have been times when those who loved this Gospel have suffered for it. They were preserved faithful, in defiance of stripes, fines, imprisonment, and death itself! But those times are *past*. We enjoy not only *light*—but *liberty*, and the rights of *conscience* and *private judgment*, in a degree until of late unknown!

We have likewise been long favored with *national peace*, though often other nations in wars have suffered great calamities. Our internal broils at different times have contributed to form and establish our present happy constitution. We breathe the air of civil

liberty. Our insulated geographical situation, and naval force, by the blessing of God, have preserved us from foreign invasions; and, when such have been attempted, the *winds* and *seas* have often fought our battles! Our wide spreading and flourishing *commerce*, has raised us to a *pitch of opulence* which excites the admiration and envy of other nations. Great Britain appears as but a small spot upon a globe or map; but our interests and influence extend, in every direction, to the uttermost parts of the earth!

Will not the Lord's words to Israel apply with equal propriety to us? "What more could I have done for My vineyard than I did? Why, when I expected a yield of *good* grapes—did it yield only *worthless* grapes?" (Isaiah 5:4)

How is the blessed Gospel improved among us? This would be a heavy day to me, if I did not believe and know, that there are some among our various denominations, who prize and adorn the Gospel. If these could be all assembled in one place, I hope they would be found to be a very considerable number; and, for their sakes, and, in answer to their prayers, I humbly trust that *God's mercy* will still be afforded to us. But, compared with the multitudes who reject, despise, or dishonor the Gospel—I fear they are very few! Too many hate it with a bitter hatred, and exert all their influence to oppose and suppress it. The great doctrines of the Reformation are treated with contempt; and both those who preach, and those who espouse them, are considered as *wild enthusiasts* or *hypocrites, knaves* or *fools*. The Gospel of God is shunned as a *pestilence*, or complained of as a *burden*, almost wherever it is known!

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16) The Gospel—recalls them from error, from wickedness, and from misery; guides

their feet into the ways of peace, and teaches them to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world. (Titus 2:12) But in the number of those who profess to receive it, there are too many who confirm and increase the prejudices of those who speak against what they know not. Alas! what extravagant opinions, what fierce dissensions, what loose conversation, what open offences, may be found among many who would be thought professors of that Gospel which only breathes the spirit of holiness, love, and peace!

What, then, must be the state of those who avowedly live without God in the world? I need not enlarge upon this painful subject, which forces itself upon the mind, if we only walk the streets, or look into the newspapers. It is not necessary to inform my hearers, that infidelity, licentiousness, perjury, profaneness, the neglect and contempt of God's worship, abound. The laws of God, and the laws of the land, so far as their object is to enforce the observance of his commands, are openly and customarily violated in every rank of life. In a day when the Lord Almighty calls to weeping and mourning—thoughtless security, dissipation, and open sin, are the characteristics of our national spirit. (Isaiah 22:12-13) The loss of public spirit, and that impatience of subordination so generally observable, so widely diffused, which are the consequences of our sins against God, are, in themselves, moral causes sufficient to ruin the nation, unless his mercy interposes in our behalf!

I would be inexcusable, considering the share I have formerly had in that unholy business, if, upon this occasion, I should omit to mention the *African slave-trade*. I do not rank this among our national sins, because I hope, and believe, a very great majority of the nation earnestly long for its suppression. But, hitherto, petty and selfish interests prevail against the voice of justice, humanity, and truth. This enormity, however, is not sufficiently laid to heart. If you are

justly shocked by what you hear of the cruelties practiced in France—you would, perhaps, be shocked much more, if you could fully conceive of the evils and miseries inseparable from this slave traffic, which I know, not from hearsay—but from my own experience and observation, are equal in atrocity, and, perhaps, superior in number, in the course of a single year, to any, or all the worst actions which have been known in France since the commencement of their revolution. There is a *cry of blood* against us; a cry accumulated by the addition of fresh victims, of thousands, of scores of thousands, I had almost said of hundreds of thousands, from year to year!

It is but a brief and faint outline I have attempted to give of the present state of this nation in the sight of Almighty God, and of the sins for which we are this day assembled to humble ourselves before him!

II. Have we not, therefore, cause to say, with the Ninevites, "*Who can tell?*" Is there not at least, '*a perhaps?*' Is there at least a *possibility*—that *we* may yet obtain mercy?

If our sins are no less numerous, no less of a scarlet dye, than those of other nations; and exceedingly aggravated beyond theirs, by being committed against clearer light, and the distinguished advantages we have long enjoyed; if we have not only transgressed the laws of God in common with others—but daringly trampled upon the gracious offers of his forgiveness, which he has long continued to propose to us, with a frequency and energy almost peculiar to ourselves; if "All day long I have spread out My hands to a disobedient and defiant people," (Romans 10:21) and, hitherto, almost in vain; if neither the tokens of his displeasure, nor the declarations of his love, have made a suitable impression upon our minds—who can tell if he will yet be entreated? May we not fear, lest he should say, "My Spirit shall strive

with them no more!" "*They are joined to their idols—let them alone!*" "When you lift up your hands in prayer—I will refuse to look. Even though you offer countless prayers—I will not listen!" (Hos. 4:17, Isaiah 1:15)

Where are now the mighty empires, which were once thought rooted and established as the everlasting mountains? They have disappeared like the mists upon the mountain tops. Nothing of them remains but their *names*. They perished, and their memorials have almost perished with them. (Psalm 9:6) The *patience of God* bore with them for a time—until the purposes for which he raised them up were answered. But, when the measure of their iniquity was full—they passed away, and were dispersed, *like foam upon the waters!* What security have *we*—against such a catastrophe? Or, what could we answer, if God should put that question to us, "Should I not punish them for this?" asks the Lord. "Should I not avenge Myself against a nation such as this?" (Jeremiah 5:9)

Where are now the churches which once flourished in Greece and in Asia? When the apostle Paul wrote to the *Gentile* churches, and when our Lord wrote his epistles to the seven churches in *Asia* (Revelation 1-3) most of them were in a prosperous state. If there ever was a time when the *commendations* given to them were applicable to professors of the Gospel in our land, I fear we can hardly claim them at present. Can it be justly said of us, that our *faith* and *love* are everywhere spoken of, and that we are *examples* to all who believe? That our *works* and *service*, and *faith* and *patience*, are known, and the last to be more than the first? (Romans 1:8, 1 Th. 1:7, Revelation 2:1, 18, 19)

Or rather, may it not be truly said of too many, that while they *profess* to believe in God—that in *works* they deny him? that they are

lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold? that they have a *name* to live, and are dead? that they have forgotten their first love? (Titus 1:16, Revelation 3:1-15, 2:4) When these *defects* and *declensions* began to prevail in the first churches, the Lord *admonished* and *warned* them; but, instead of watching and repenting, they gradually became *more remiss!* At length their glory departed, and their candlesticks were *removed* out of their places. Many regions, which once rejoiced in the light of the Gospel, have been long overspread with *Mohammedan darkness*, and the inhabitants are wretched, ignorant, slaves!

Let us not trust in *outward privileges*, nor rest in a *form of godliness* destitute of the power. It will be in vain to say, "The *temple* of the Lord, the *temple* of the Lord are we!" (Jer. 7:4) if the *Lord* of the temple should depart from us! When the Israelites were afraid of the Philistines, they carried the ark of the Lord with them to battle. But God disappointed their *vain confidence*. He delivered the *ark of his glory* into the hands of their enemies, (1 Samuel 4:5-11) to teach them, and to teach us, that *formal hypocritical worshipers* have no good ground to hope for his protection.

Alas! then, who can tell? Appearances are very dark at present. Besides what we may expect or fear from the rage and madness of our *foreign enemies*, we have much to be apprehensive of at *home!* A spirit of discord has gone forth. "Israel grew fat—and rebelled; the people grew heavy, plump, and stuffed! Then they abandoned the God who had made them; they made light of the Rock of their salvation!" (Deut. 32:15) Many Britons seem weary of liberty, peace, and order. Our happy constitution, our mild government, our many privileges, admired by *other* nations—are *despised* and *depreciated* among ourselves; and that not only by the thoughtless and licentious, by those who, having little to lose, may promise themselves a

possibility of gain in a time of national disturbance and confusion; but they are abetted and instigated by people of sense, character, and even of religion! I would be quite at a loss to account for this, if I did not consider it as a token of the Lord's displeasure. When he withdraws his blessing, no unity or peace can long exist.

"Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a cheerful heart, even though you had an abundance of everything, you will serve your *enemies* the Lord will send against you, in famine, thirst, nakedness, and a lack of everything. He will place an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you!" Deuteronomy 28:47-48) These words of Moses to *rebellious Israel* emphatically describe the former and the present state of many of the French nation, who have been plundered, and were glad if only they could escape (great numbers could not so escape) with the loss of *their all*, and at the peril of their lives, to a more peaceful shore. May their sufferings remind us of *our deserts!* Who can tell if the Lord may yet be merciful unto us, and exempt us from similar calamities!

III. But though we have much cause to mourn for our sins, and humbly to confess our deserved judgments, **let us not despond.** The Lord our God is a *merciful* God. "Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will have pity on us and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us!"

If the *fast* of this day is not confined to one day—but if, by his blessing, it may produce sincere repentance—then I am warranted to tell you, from his Word, that *there is yet hope!* You who tremble for *God's ark*, for the *cause of God*, whose eyes affect your hearts, who grieve for sin, and for the miseries which sin has multiplied upon the earth—take courage! Let the hearts of the wicked shake, like the leaves of the trees when agitated by a storm; (Isaiah 7:2) but you

have no cause to tremble like them. The Lord God is your refuge and strength, your resting place, and your hiding place! Under the shadow of His wings—you shall be safe! (Psalm 46:1, Psalm 90:1, Psalm 119:114)

1. He who *loved* you and *died* for your sins—is the Lord of glory! All power in heaven and in earth is committed unto him. The *Lord* reigns—though the *earth* be ever so agitated. All creatures are instruments of his will. The wrath of man, so far as it is permitted to act, shall praise him; and shall be made subservient to the accomplishment of his great designs! And the remainder of that wrath, of all their projected violence, which does not coincide with his wise and comprehensive plan, he will restrain! (Mat. 28:18, Psalm 99:1, Psalm 76:10) In vain they rage, and fret, and threaten! They act under a *secret commission*, and can do no more than he permits them! If they attempt it—he has his hook and a bridle in their mouths! When the enemies would come in like a flood—he can lift up a standard against them. As he has set bounds and bars to the *tempestuous sea*, beyond which it cannot pass, saying, "This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt!" So, with equal ease, he can "still the tumults of the nations!" (2 Kings 19:28, Isaiah 59:19, Job 38:10-11, Psalm 65:7)

You do well to mourn for the sins and miseries—of those who know him not. But if you make the Almighty God your fear and your dread—he will be a *sanctuary* to you, and keep your hearts in peace! "Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas!" (Isaiah 8:13-14, Psalm 46:2)

2. Your part and mine is to WATCH and PRAY. Let us pray for *ourselves*, that we may be found waiting, with our loins girded

up, and our lamps burning, that we may be prepared to meet his will in every event. (Mark 13:35, Mark 14:38) Let us pray for the *peace of Jerusalem*, for *God's church*, which is dear to him, as the pupil of his eye, for the spread of his Gospel, and the extension of his kingdom—until his great name is known and adored from the rising to the setting of the sun, (Mal. 1:11) and the whole earth shall be filled with his glory!

Many splendid prophecies are yet unfulfilled; and he is now bringing forward their accomplishment. *Light* will undoubtedly arise out of this *darkness*. Let us earnestly pray for a blessing from on high, upon our counsels of government and parliament, and upon all subordinate authorities in church and state—that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, that true religion and good order may be established, and iniquity be put to shame and silence! Thus we may hope to be secured by the sure, though secret, mark of *divine protection*. The Lord will be *our shield*—though many should suffer or fall around us. The very hairs of our heads are numbered. Or if, for the manifestation of our faith, and the power of his grace—he should permit us to share in common calamities, we may rely upon him to afford us *strength according to our day*. He is always near to his people, a *very present help* in the time of trouble; and he can make the season of their *greatest tribulations*, to be the season of their *sweetest consolations!* (Ezekiel. 9:4, Mat. 9:30, Deu. 33:25, 2 Corinthians 1:5)

3. And let us pray in FAITH. Let us remember what great things the Lord *has* done in answer to prayer. When sin had given Sennacherib rapid success in his invasion of Judah, he did not know that he was no more than '*God's axe*', or a '*saw in the hand of God*'. He ascribed his victories to his own prowess, and thought himself equally sure of capturing Jerusalem. But Hezekiah defeated him—

upon his knees. He spread Sennacherib's blasphemous letter before the Lord in the temple and prayed—and the Assyrian army melted away like snow. (Isaiah 10:15, 37:14-36) When *Peter* was locked up and chained in prison—the chains fell from his hands, the locks and bolts gave way, and the iron gate opened, while the church was united in earnest prayer for his deliverance! (Acts 12:5-13)

And as we have *heard*—so have we *seen*. God has signally answered the prayers of his people, in our own time. Much prayer, both public and private, was offered for our beloved King during his late illness; and how wonderful, how sudden, how seasonable, was his recovery! Surely this was the finger of God! When God thus removed our fears, "we were like men who dreamed!" (Psalm 126:1)

I believe prayer was no less efficacious, towards the end of the year 1792. I know many people treated the idea of *danger* at that time as false, because the Lord was pleased to avert it. But I hope we have not quite forgotten the language we heard, and the people we daily met with in the street, the many daring conspiracies which were held in this city, and the threatenings which were written in large characters, upon the walls of our houses, at almost every corner. But the *hearts of men were turned like the tide*, in a critical moment. Then I think the interposition of the Lord was evident. We have had repeated proofs that God hears and answers prayer.

The present likewise is a very important crisis. All that is dear to us, as men, as Britons, as Christians, is threatened. Our *enemies* are inveterate and enraged! Our *sins* testify against us. But if we humble ourselves before God, forsake our sins, and unite in supplications for his mercy—who can tell, but that he may be entreated to give us that help which it would be in vain to expect from man? Yes, we have encouragement to hope, that if God will be *for* us—then none can

prevail *against* us. (Romans 8:11) But without his blessing, our most powerful efforts, and best concerted undertakings, cannot succeed for a moment!

You who have access to the throne of grace, whose hearts are concerned for the glory of God, and who lament not only the temporal calamities attendant upon war—but the many thousands of souls who are yearly plunged by war into an eternal, unchangeable state—you, I trust, will show yourselves true friends to your country, by bearing your testimony, and exerting your influence against **SIN**—*the procuring cause of all our sorrows*; and by standing in the breach, and pleading with God for mercy, in behalf of yourselves, and of the nation. If ten people, thus disposed, had been found even in Sodom—it would have escaped destruction! (Genesis 18:32)

IV. There may be some people in this assembly, who are little concerned for their *own* sins, and are, of course, incapable of taking a proper part in the service of this day. Yet I am glad that you are here; I *pity* you, I *warn* you. If you should live to see a time of public distress—*what* will you do? To *whom* will you look, or *where* will you flee for help? All that is dear to you may be torn from you, or you from it!

Or if it pleases God to prolong our tranquility, you are liable to many heavy calamities in private life. And if you should be exempted from these, *death* is inevitable, and may be near! My heart wishes you the possession of those principles which would support you in all the changes of life, and make your dying pillow comfortable. Are you unwilling to be happy? Or can you be happy too soon? Many Christian people are now looking upon you—who once were as lost as you are now. And I doubt not—that they are praying that you may be as they now are. Try to pray for yourself! Our God is assuredly in the

midst of us. His gracious ear is attentive to every supplicant. Seek him while he is to be found. Jesus died for sinners, and he has said, "those who come to me—I will never cast out." (John 6:37) He is likewise the author of that faith, by which alone you can come rightly to him. If you ask him for saving faith—he will give it to you; if you seek it, in the means of his appointment, you shall assuredly find it. (Mat. 7:7)

If you refuse this, there remains no other sacrifice for your sin. (Hebrews 10:26-27) If you are not saved by faith in his blood—you are lost forever! "Oh! Pay homage to the Son, or He will be angry, and you will perish in your rebellion; for His anger may ignite at any moment! Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" Psalm 2:12

"Come, let us return to the Lord! He has torn us in pieces; now He will heal us. He has injured us; now He will bandage our wounds!" Hosea 6:1

"Who can tell? God may turn and relent; He may turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish!" Jonah 3:9

The Present and Future Rest of True Believers

by John Newton

"Come to Me, all of you who are weary and heavy burdened—and I will give you **rest!**" Matthew 11:28

The *learned* have a variety of *arguments* whereby to prove the Scripture to be the Word of God. But though that kind of proof, which may be brought in a way of *reasoning* and *external evidence*,

is doubtless useful upon proper occasions. Yet, I apprehend, the chief and most satisfactory argument to those who are capable of receiving it, arises from the correspondence between the subject matter of the Scripture, and the state of an awakened mind. When the eyes of the understanding are opened, we begin to see everything around us, to be just so as the Scripture has described them. Then, and not until then, we perceive, that what we read in the Bible concerning the horrid evil of sin, the vileness of our fallen nature, the darkness and ignorance of those who know not God, our own emptiness, and the impossibility of finding relief and comfort from creatures, is exactly true. "He opened their minds—so they could understand the Scriptures." Luke 24:45

And as we find our *disease* precisely described, so we perceive a suitableness in the proposed *remedy*. We need a **Savior**, and he must be a mighty one; but though our needs and sins, our fears and enemies, are great and numerous, we are convinced that the character of Christ is sufficient to answer them all. We need a **rest**, a rest which the world cannot give. Inquire where we will among the creatures, experience brings in the same answer from all, "It is not in me!" This again confirms the Word of God, which has forewarned us that we shall meet nothing but disappointment in such worldly pursuits. But there is a spiritual rest spoken of which we know to be the very thing we need, and all our remaining solicitude is how to attain it. From hence, as I said, we may assuredly conclude, that the book which gives us such just views of everything that passes, must be given by inspiration from Him who is the searcher of hearts. This proof is equally plain and conclusive to all capacities that are spiritually enlightened, and such only are able to understand it. We are now to speak of this **promised rest**. And here two things offer to our consideration.

1. **What** this rest is.

2. **How** this rest is obtained.

1. WHAT this rest is. The Greek word expresses something more than rest, or a mere *relaxation* from toil; it denotes *refreshment* likewise. A person weary with long bearing a heavy burden, will need not only to have it removed—but likewise he needs food and refreshment, to restore his spirits, and to repair his wasted strength. Such is the rest of the Gospel. It not only puts an end to our fruitless labor—but it affords a sweet reviving cordial. There is not only peace—but joy in believing. Taken at large, we may consider it as two-fold.

1st, A PRESENT rest. So the Apostle speaks, "We who have believed enter that rest." (Hebrews 4:3)

(1.) **The common wearisome pursuit of the worldling** is described in Scripture: "Why do you spend your money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2) "Many are saying—Who can show us anything good?" (Psalm 4:6) "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

Worldlings are wandering from object to object in quest of happiness, but are always frustrated by incessant and repeated disappointments. We should pity a person whom we should see seeking some necessary thing day after day—in a place which we knew it was impossible to be found there. This is, however, the case with all people—until they come to Christ. Satisfaction is what they profess to aim at; and they turn over every stone (as we say), they try every expedient, to find lasting happiness—but in vain. Real satisfaction is only to be found in Jesus! When they come to Him, their wishes are fully answered and satisfied! "Everyone who drinks

this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst!" John 4:13-14

This is exemplified by our Lord in the character of a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, (Mat. 13:46) who was still upon the inquiry until he had found one pearl of great price. This answered and exceeded his desires! Upon the discovery of this one, he rejoiced to forego all his former acquisitions, and to give up every other possession or purpose that he might obtain it.

(2.) I have spoken something concerning the wearisome exercise of a conscience **burdened with guilt**: but by coming to Jesus and believing in him, an end is put to this. When we are enabled to view our sins as laid upon Christ, that those who come are accepted in the Beloved, that there is no more condemnation—but pardon, reconciliation, and adoption, are the sure privileges of all who trust in him—O the sweet calm that immediately takes place in the soul! It is something more than *deliverance*. There is a *pleasure* more than answerable to the former pain, a comfort greater than all the trouble that went before it. Yes, the remembrance of the former bitterness, greatly enhances the present pleasure. And the soul understands and experiences the meaning of those Scriptures, "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." (Psalm 126:1-2) "In that day you will sing: Praise the Lord! He was angry with me, but now he comforts me. See, God has come to save me. I will trust in him and not be afraid. The Lord God is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation!" (Isaiah 12:1-2)

(3.) There is likewise a rest from the **power of sin**. In vain is this sought from *resolutions* and *endeavors* in our own strength. Even after we are spiritually awakened, and begin to understand the

Gospel salvation, it is usually for a season rather a *fight* than a *rest*. But when we are brought nearer to Christ, and taught to live upon him as our sanctification, deriving all our strength and motives from him by faith, we obtain a comparative rest in this respect also. We find hard things become easy, and mountains sink into plains, by power displayed in our behalf. Farther,

(4.) There is a rest from our own **works**. The believer is quite delivered from the **law** as a covenant, and owes it no longer service in that view. His *obedience* is gracious, cheerful, the effect of love; and therefore he is freed from those fears and burdens which once disturbed him in the way of *duty*. At first there was a secret, though not allowed dependence on *himself*. When his frames were lively—he was strong, and thought he had something to trust to—but under a *change* (and changes *will* happen), he was at his wit's end. But there is a *promised*, and therefore an *attainable* rest in this respect; a liberty and power to repose on the finished *Work* and unchangeable *Word* of Christ; to follow him steadily through light and darkness; to glory in him not only when our frames are brightest; and to trust in him assuredly when we are at our lowest ebb.

Such is the present rest; in different degrees according to the proportion of faith, and capable of increase even in those who have attained most, so long as we remain in this imperfect state. But there is,

2ndly, A FUTURE rest besides and beyond all that can be experienced here. "There is a special rest still waiting for the people of God." (Hebrews 4:9) Our most enlarged ideas of that glory which shall be revealed, are faint and imperfect. "Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes we will

be like him, for we will see him as he really is!" (1 John 3:2) Who can describe or conceive the happiness of heaven? The most we can clearly understand of it lies in *negatives*. It will be as unlike as possible—to this wilderness of sin and sorrow where we are now confined. Here we are in a warfare—but then we shall enter into perfect rest. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him!" 1 Corinthians 2:9

(1.) Heaven will be a rest from all SIN. No 'unclean thing' shall ever defile or disturb us forever! We shall be free from sin in **ourselves**. This alone would be worth dying for! Indwelling sin is a burden under which even the redeemed must groan, while they sojourn in the body; and those who are most spiritual are most deeply affected with shame, humiliation, and grief, on account their sins—because they have the clearest views of the holiness of God, the spirituality of the law, the love of Christ, and the deceitfulness of their own hearts! Therefore the Apostle Paul, though perhaps in grace and talents, in zeal and usefulness, was distinguished above all the children of Adam—accounted himself the 'chief of sinners,' (1 Ti. 1:15) 'less than the least of all saints,' (Ephesians 3:8) and cried out under the disparity he felt between what he *was*, and what he *would be*, "O wretched man that I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin!" (Romans 7:24) But we shall not carry this burden of sin beyond the grave. The hour of death shall free us from the *inbred enemies* (the inseparable attendants of this frail perishing nature) which now trouble us, and we shall see them no more forever!

Again; we shall be free from all the displeasing effects of sin in **others**. Our hearts shall be no more pained, nor our ears wounded, nor our eyes filled with tears—by those evils which fill the earth.

Now, like Lot in Sodom, we are grieved everyday, with all the immorality and wickedness around him. (2 Peter 2:7) Who that has any love to the Lord Jesus, any spark of true holiness, any sense of the worth of souls in his heart, can see what passes among us without trembling? How openly, daringly, almost universally, are the commandments of God broken, his Gospel despised, his patience abused, and his power defied. To be a silent spectator of these things is sufficiently grievous! But if (as we are in duty bound) we dare to stand as witnesses for God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, we find the *spirit of Cain* instantly takes fire, and denounces war against all who should presume to say, that we ought to obey and fear God rather than men. Invectives and in treatment are the certain lot of all who openly and consistently appear on the Lord's side! And if they escape stripes and bonds, imprisonment and death—it is to be ascribed to the restraints of Divine Providence, and (as a means in our happy land) to the temper of the laws, and to the clemency of the powers under whom we live. These things often constrain the believer to say, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away and be at rest." (Psalm 55:6) Let us not be weary or faint in our minds; before long this *wish* shall be answered. A glorious rest awaits you, where sin and sinners shall have no place, nor the alarms of war be any more heard.

(2.) Heaven will be a rest from all outward AFFLICTIONS, which, though necessary, and, under the influence of Divine grace, profitable, yet they are grievous to bear; but then they will be necessary no more. Where there is no sin—there shall be no sorrow. Then, "God will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever!" (Revelation 21:4)

(3.) Heaven will be a rest from SATAN'S TEMPTATIONS.

How busy is this adversary of God and man, what various arts, what surprising force, what constant assiduity does he employ to ensnare, distress, and terrify those who by grace have escaped from his servitude. He says, like Pharaoh of old, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will destroy!" (Exodus 15:9) He follows them to the last stage of life—but he can follow them no farther. The moment of their departure out of the body—shall place them beyond his reach forever

(4.) Heaven will be a rest from unsatisfied desires. Here on earth—the more we drink, the more we thirst. But in heaven, our highest wishes shall be crowned and exceeded; we shall rest in full communion with Him whom we love; we shall no more complain of interruptions and imperfections, of an absent God, and a careless heart. Here on earth—when we obtain a little glimpse of His presence, when He brings us into His banqueting-house, and spreads His banner of love over us—how gladly would we remain in such a desirable frame! How unwilling are we to 'come down' from the mount! But these pleasing seasons are quickly ended, and often give place to some sudden unexpected trial, which robs us of all that sweetness in which we lately rejoiced. But when we ascend the holy hill of God above, we shall never again 'come down'; we shall be forever with the Lord, never offend him, and never be separated from him again. We shall likewise rest in full conformity to him. "I will see Your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be fully satisfied with Your presence!" (Psalm 17:15) Here on earth—we find a mixture of evil in our best moments; when we approach nearest to God, we have the liveliest sense of our defilement, and how much we fall short in every branch of duty, in every temper of our hearts. But when we shall see Jesus as he is, we shall be fully transformed into his image, and be perfectly like him!

2. HOW is this rest to be obtained? Blessed be God, in that way which alone can render it attainable by such *unworthy indigent creatures*. If it was to be *bought*—we have nothing to offer for it. If it was given as a reward of *merit*—we can do nothing to deserve it. But Jesus has said, "I will **give** you rest!" Our title to it cost *him* dear; he purchased it for us with his own blood; but to us it comes freely. Sincere faith in Jesus puts us in immediate possession of the first-fruits, the pledge of this inheritance; and faith will lead us powerfully and safely, through all hindrances and enemies, to the full enjoyment of the whole.

FAITH unites us to Christ; gives us an immediate interest in all the benefits of his life, death, and intercession; opens the way of communication for all needful supplies of grace here, and insures to us the accomplishment of all the Lord has spoken to us of, in a state of glory. "He who *believes* shall be saved;" (Mark 16:16) —saved in defiance of all the opposition of earth and hell; saved, notwithstanding he is in himself *unstable* as water, *weak* as a bruised reed, and *helpless* as a newborn babe! What Jesus will give—none can take away. Only remember that it is a *free gift*. Receive it thankfully—and rejoice in the Giver. Let him have all the glory of his own undertaking. Renounce every other *hope* and every other *plea*—but his promise and mediation. Commit your souls to him—and then fear nothing. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms!" (Deu. 33:27) He will *fight* your battles, *heal* your wounds, *refresh* your fainting spirits, *guide* you by his counsel while here, and at last *receive* you to himself!

May we not therefore say, 'Happy are the people who are in such a case! Happy they, who have been enabled to accept this gracious invitation, who have already entered upon the rest of grace, and have a well-grounded expectation that they shall rest in glory!'

Believers, what should you fear, or why complain? Look *back* to where the Lord found you dead in sin, helpless and hopeless, and insensible of your danger! Look *forward* to what he has provided for you—a crown of life, and a kingdom that cannot be shaken. "For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay!" (1 Peter 1:4) Think of the love, the sufferings, the glory of *him* to whom you owe these blessings—and let these considerations animate you to run with patience (Hebrews 12:1) and thankfulness, the race that is set before you.

Happy likewise are you whose hearts are fixed upon this *rest*, and this *Savior*, though as yet you are in heaviness through manifold temptations. The Lord will give you REST! Doubt it not, he cannot deny himself; wait his hour patiently; though he seems to tarry long, yet maintain your confidence in his promise. Redouble your prayers, cry mightily to him—he will not (as perhaps many around you do) rebuke your importunity, and charge you to hold your peace. Look at the generations of old, and see—did ever any sincerely trust in the Lord—and was confounded? or did any abide in his fear—and was forsaken? Or whom did he ever despise—who sincerely called upon him?

And you who are yet *strangers to God's rest*, are thus far happy that you are still *spared*; and have the Gospel continued to you. The Lord is still waiting to be gracious! He says to all, "Come unto me—and you shall find rest for your souls!" Do you not see this rest as *desirable*? What rest, either here or hereafter, can you expect, if you remain, in the *service of sin*? Why may not you obtain your liberty? You are no worse than others who have already attained this rest, either by nature or practice. Though you have been *transgressors from the womb*, you are not excluded, if you do not exclude

yourselves! Though your sinful habits and inclinations are exceedingly strong—he is able to subdue them. There is a power in his blood, and in his Spirit which he is exalted to bestow, sufficient to make the *Ethiopian* change his skin, and the *leopard* its spots! (Jer. 13:23) His power can soften the hardest heart, pardon the most aggravated guilt, and to enable those to do good, who have been accustomed to do evil.

Arise, he calls you! O may he accompany the outward call of his Word, with the effectual power of his grace—that you may this instant obey his voice, and flee to him for refuge! Where else can you flee? Who, but Jesus, can save you from the wrath to come? Be wise—and delay no longer! "But, if you will not hear—my eye shall weep for you in secret places." (Jer. 13:17) If you will not come to Jesus for life—you must eternally perish in hell! If you are outside of Christ—God is angry with you every day. The *curse* of his broken law lies heavy upon you, whether you are asleep or awake, abroad or at home, at the market or in the church. The wrath of God on you! "If a person does not repent, God will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He will prepare his deadly weapons and ignite his flaming arrows! (Psalm 7:12) He has bent his bow, and made it ready; he has prepared the instruments of death to smite you; he has ordained the *arrows of his vengeance* against you! And *can* you, *dare* you—go on in your sins, and say, "I shall have peace"? O may be wise in time! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" (Hebrews 10:31) "Consider this, you who *forget God*—or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue you!" (Psalm 50:22)

Reading the Bible

by John Newton

"Your Words were found, and I ate them. Your Words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart!" Jeremiah 15:16

Books and letters written in a proper spirit, may, if the Lord is pleased to smile upon them, have their use. Indeed, the truths essential to the peace of our souls are so simple, and may be reduced to so few heads, that while each of them singly may furnish a volume drawn out at length, they may all be comprised in small compass.

But an awakened mind which thirsts after the Savior, and seeks wisdom by reading and praying over the Scripture, has little occasion for a *library of human writings*. The Bible is the fountain from whence every stream that deserves our notice is drawn; and, though we may occasionally pay some attention to the *streams*—we have personally an equal right with others to apply immediately to the *fountain-head*, and draw the water of life for ourselves! The *purest streams* are not wholly freed from the *tinge of the soil* through which they run; a mixture of human infirmity is inseparable from the best human composition. But in the *fountain*—the truth is unmixed!

Again, men teach us by **many** words; and if they would give us their full views of the subject, require us to read a whole volume, the life and substance of which is perhaps expressed with greater force and greater advantage in the Scripture by a single sentence—which is rather *diluted* than *explained*, by our feeble expositions. A volume may be easily written upon the *grace of humility*, and to show the evil and folly of a self-seeking spirit. But if the author should introduce this subject with our Savior's words, "The Son of Man came not into the world to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many;" whoever was duly impressed with that short introduction, would have no great occasion to read the rest of the book!

The preaching of the Word of God being an instituted means of grace, ought to be thankfully and frequently improved. And human books that have a savor and unction may likewise be helpful, provided we read them with *caution*, compare them with the Scripture, and do not give ourselves implicitly to the rules or decisions of any man or set of men—but remember that one is our *Master and infallible Teacher*, even Christ. But the chief and grand means of edification, without which all other helps will disappoint us, and prove like clouds without water—are the *Bible* and *prayer*—the *Word* of grace and the *Throne* of grace. A frequent perusal of the Bible will give us an enlarged and comprehensive view of the whole of true religion—its origin, nature, genius, and tendency—and preserve us from an over-attachment to any *system of man's compilation*.

The **fault** of the several *doctrinal systems*, under which, as under so many banners, the different denominations of Christians are ranged, is, that there is usually something *left out* which ought to have been taken in—and something *admitted*, of supposed advantage, not authorized by the Scriptural standard.

A Bible Christian, therefore, will see much to approve in a *variety* of forms and parties; the providence of God may lead or fix him in a more immediate connection with some one of them—but his spirit and affection will not be confined within these narrow enclosures. He insensibly borrows and unites with which is excellent in each, perhaps without knowing how far he agrees with them, because he finds all in the written Word of God.

I know not a better *rule of reading the Scripture*, than to read it through from beginning to end; and, when we have finished it once, to begin it again. We shall meet with many passages which we can

make little improvement of, but not so many in the second reading as in the first, and fewer in the third than in the second—provided we pray to Him who has the keys to open our understandings, and to anoint our eyes with his spiritual eye-salve! The course of *reading* today, will give some light for what we shall read *tomorrow*, and throw a farther light upon what we read *yesterday*. Experience alone, can prove the advantage of this method, if steadily persevered in. To make a few efforts, and then give up—is like taking a few steps and then standing still, which would do little towards completing a long journey. But, though a person walked *slowly*, and but a *little* way in a day—if he walked every day, and with his face always in the same direction, year after year—he would in time travel over the globe! By thus traveling *patiently* and *steadily* through the Scripture, and repeating our progress—we would increase in Scriptural knowledge to the end of life!

The Old and New Testament, the doctrines, precepts, and promises, the history, the examples, admonitions, and warnings, etc. would mutually illustrate and strengthen each other—and nothing that is written for our instruction would be *overlooked*. Happy would I be, could I fully follow the advice I am now offering to you. I wish you may profit by my experience. Alas, how much time have I lost and wasted, which, had I been wise—I would have devoted to reading and studying the Bible! But my evil *heart* obstructs the dictates of my *judgment*, I often feel a reluctance to read this *book of books*, and a disposition to hew out *broken cisterns* which afford me no water, while the *fountain of living waters* are close within my reach!

QUESTION: What are the most obvious Causes, Symptoms, and Effects of a Decline in the Spiritual Life?

Believers are, by nature, dead in trespasses and sins, even as others—but, by faith in the Son of God, they are made partakers of a new and endless life. They derive it from him; and he has said, "Because I live, you shall live also." But the *life of this life*, if I may so speak, its manifestation and exercise, is subject to great changes. A *sick* man is still alive—but he has lost the cheerfulness, activity, and vigor which he possessed while he was in health. There are many people, who if they are, as we would hope, really *alive* to God—are at least *sick, languid*, and in a *declining* state. May the great Physician restore them! It is sometimes said, that "the knowledge of a disease amounts to half a remedy"; which will hold thus far in the present case, that unless we are sensible of our *disorder* and our *danger*—we shall not be heartily solicitous for a *recovery*.

The *causes* and *symptoms* or *effects* of such a decline are very numerous, nor is it always easy to distinguish them, for they have reciprocal influence to strengthen each other. What may be assigned as the cause, in many cases, is likewise a proof that the plague is already begun; and the effects may be considered as so many causes, which render the malady more confirmed, and more dangerous.

Among the many general **CAUSES**, we may assign a principal place to **doctrinal error**. I do not include every mistake or erroneous sentiment, which may be adopted or retained; but there are some errors, which, for the suddenness and violence of their operation, may be compared to 'poison'! Thus the Galatians, by listening to false teachers, were seduced from the simplicity of the gospel; the consequence was, that they quickly lost the blessedness they had once spoken of. Poison is seldom taken in the gross; but, if *mingled* with food, the mischief is not suspected until it is discovered by the *effect*.

Thus those who are employed in *poisoning souls*, generally make use of some important and beneficial truth, as a vehicle by which they convey their *malignant drug* into the minds of the unwary! Perhaps they speak well of the person and atonement of Christ, or they exalt the riches and freedom of divine grace—while under the veil of these fair pretenses, they insinuate prejudices against the nature or necessity of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Others speak strongly in general terms in favor of personal holiness—but their aim is to withdraw the heart from a dependence upon the Savior's blood, and the influences of his Holy Spirit, without which the most studied exactness of conduct, differs no less from the holiness of the gospel—than a picture or a statue, or a dead carcass, differs from a living man.

Whoever is thus prevailed upon, in the great and essential points of Scriptural doctrine—to separate, in his judgment and experience, those things which God has joined together, is already infected with a disease in its own nature mortal, and his religion, unless the Lord mercifully interposes, will degenerate into either *licentiousness* or *formality!*

We live in a day when too many are tossed to and fro, like ships without helm or pilot, by various winds of doctrine; and therefore those who wish well to their own souls, cannot be too much upon their guard against that spirit of *curiosity* and desire for 'new things', which the apostle describes by the metaphor of having *itching ears*, a desire of hearing every novel and singular teacher, lest they imbibe errors before they are aware, and become a prey to the *sleight* and *craftiness* of those who lie in wait to deceive!

Spiritual pride and **self-admiration** will likewise infallibly cause a declension in the divine life, though the mind may be preserved

from the infection of doctrinal errors, and though the power of gospel truth may for a time have been really experienced. If our attainments in knowledge and giftedness, and even in grace—seduce us into a good opinion of ourselves, as if we were wise and good—we are already ensnared, in danger of falling every step we take, of mistaking the right path, and proceeding from bad to worse, without a power of correcting or even of discovering our deviations—unless and until the Lord mercifully interposes, by restoring us to a spirit of humility and dependence upon Himself. For God, who gives more grace to the humble—resists the proud! He beholds them with abhorrence—in proportion to the degree in which they admire themselves. It is the invariable law of his kingdom, that everyone who exalts himself—shall be abased.

True Christians, through the remaining evil of their hearts, and the subtle temptations of their enemy, are liable, not only to the workings of that pride which is common to our fallen nature—but to a certain kind of pride, which, though the most absurd and intolerable in any person, can only be found among those who make profession of the gospel. We have nothing but what we have received, and therefore to be proud of titles, wealth, knowledge, success, or any temporal advantages, by which the providence of God has distinguished us—is downright sinful! And for those who confess themselves to be 'sinners', and therefore deserving of nothing but misery and wrath—to be proud of those peculiar blessings which are derived from the gospel of his grace, is a wickedness of which even the demons are not capable of!

The apostle Paul was so aware of his danger of being *exalted above measure*, through the abundant revelations and peculiar favors which the Lord had afforded him, that he says, "There was given me a messenger of Satan to buffet me." He speaks of this sharp

dispensation as an *additional mercy*, because he saw it was necessary, and designed to keep him humble and attentive to his own weakness.

Ministers who are honored with singular abilities and success, have great need of watchfulness and prayer on this account. The *Lord* sees not as *man* sees. Simple-hearted hearers are apt to admire their favorite preacher, and almost to consider him as something more than man in the pulpit, taking it for granted that he is deeply affected himself with the truths, which, with so much apparent liberty and power, he proposes to them; while, perhaps, the *poor worm* is secretly indulging self-applause, and pleasing himself with the numbers and attention of those who hang upon his words!

Perhaps such thoughts will occasionally rise in the minds of the best ministers; but, if they are allowed, if they become habitual, and enter strongly into the idea he forms of his own character; and if, while he professes to preach Christ Jesus the Lord—he is preaching himself, and seeking his own glory—he is guilty of high treason against the Majesty of him in whose name he speaks. And sooner or later, the effects of his pride will be visible and noticed. Errors in judgment, gross misconduct, and abatement of zeal, of gifts, of influence, are evils, always to be dreaded, when spiritual pride has gained an ascendancy, whether in public or in private life. "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" 1 Corinthians 4:7 "The Lord Almighty has planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth." Isaiah 23:9

An inordinate desire and attachment to the things of this present world, may be assigned as a third prevailing cause of a

spiritual declension. Unless this evil principle is mortified in its root—by the doctrine of the cross—it will in time prevail over the most splendid profession. That love of the world, which is inconsistent with the true love of God—manifests itself in two different ways, as men by temper and habit are differently inclined:

The first is covetousness or greediness for gain. This was the ruin of Judas, and probably the cause of the defection of Demas. By the honorable mention made of him in some of Paul's epistles, Demas seems to have had much of Paul's confidence and esteem for a season. Yet at length his covetous passion prevailed, and the last account we have of him from the apostle, is, "Demas has deserted me—because he loved this present world." 2 Timothy 4:10

Again, there are people not chargeable with the love of money for its own sake—for they rather squander it—than hoard it. Yet they are equally under the influence of a worldly spirit! They manifest their worldly hearts—by an expensive taste in the articles of dress, furniture and feasting—which are always unsuitable to a Christian profession.

It is not easy to exactly mark out the precise line of Christian conduct in these respects, which befits the different situations in which the providence of God has placed us. Nor is it necessary, to those who are poor in spirit—and upright in heart. A simple desire of pleasing God, and adorning the gospel, will solve most cases of how a believer should spend his money—which occupy little and trifling minds. The inclination of our heart—will always direct and regulate our voluntary expenses. Those who love the Lord, and whose spirits are lively in His service, will avoid both stinginess and selfish extravagance. They will rather lean to the frugal side in how they

spend their money on themselves—that they may be better able to promote God's cause, and to relieve the necessities of His people.

Misers, who can be content with the mere form of religion, will hoard all they can save—in order to gratify their avarice! Others will spend all they can spare—to gratify their vanity, or their worldly appetites!

It is not easy to determine which of these evils is the greatest. Perhaps of the two, the miser is least accessible to conviction, and consequently the most difficult to be reclaimed. But a desire for extravagance and indulgence, if persisted in, will gradually lead to such compliances with the spirit and maxims of the world, as will certainly weaken, if not wholly suppress—the exercise of vital godliness. In whatever degree the "love of the world" prevails—the "health of the soul" will proportionably decline.

"People who long to be rich, fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows!" 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

Many other causes might be enumerated—but most of them may be reduced to the heads I have already mentioned. The practice of a single sin, or the omission of a single duty—if allowed against the light of conscience, and, if habitual, will be sufficient to keep the soul weak, unfruitful, and uncomfortable, and lay it open to the impression of every surrounding temptation. Sometimes *unfaithfulness* to light already received, perverts the judgment, and then errors which seem to afford some countenance or plea for a sin which the heart will not give up, are readily embraced, to evade the remonstrances of conscience. At other times, *errors*, incautiously admitted, imperceptibly weaken the sense of duty, and by degrees,

spread their influences over the whole conduct. Faith and a good conscience are frequently mentioned together by the apostle, for they are inseparable; to part with one is to part with both. Those who hold the mystery of faith in a pure conscience, shall be preserved in a thriving frame of spirit, they shall grow in grace, go on from strength to strength, shall walk honorably and comfortably. But so far as the doctrines or the rules of the gospel are neglected, a wasting sickness will prey upon the vitals of religion, a sickness, in its nature mortal, and from which none recover—but those on whom God mercifully bestows the grace of repentance unto life.

The **SYMPTOMS** of such a soul sickness are very numerous and diversified, as tempers and situations vary. A few of those which are more generally apparent, and sure indications of a decline in religion are the following.

Bodily sickness is usually attended with loss of appetite, inactivity, and restlessness. Likewise, the sickness of the *soul* deprives it of rest and peace, causes a dullness and indolence in the service of God, and an indisposition to the means of grace, to secret waiting upon God, and to the public ordinances. These appointments, so necessary to preserve spiritual health, are either gradually neglected and given up, or the attendance upon them dwindles into a mere formal round, without relish and without benefit.

To the healthy man, plain food is savory—but the palate, when vitiated by sickness, becomes picky and fastidious, and hankers after varieties and delicacies. Likewise, when the sincere milk of the gospel, plain truth delivered in plain words, is no longer pleasing—but a person requires curious speculations, or the frothy eloquence of man's wisdom, to engage his attention, it is a bad sign. For these are suited to nourish, not the constitution—but the disease.

From slighting or trifling with those means which God has provided to satisfy the soul—the next step usually is—to seek relief from a compliance with the spirit, customs, and amusements of the *world*. And these compliances, when once allowed, will soon be defended; and those who cannot approve or imitate such conformity, will be represented as under the influence of a narrow, legal, or pharisaic spirit.

The sick professor is in a delirium, which prevents him from *feeling* his disease—and he rather supposes the alteration in his conduct is owing to an increase of wisdom, light, and liberty. He considers the time when he was more strict and circumspect as a time of ignorance, will smile at the recollection of what he now deems his *childish scruples*, and congratulates himself that he has happily outgrown them, and now finds that the services of *God* and the *world* are not so incompatible as he once thought them to be.

Yet while he thus relaxes the rule of his own conduct, he is a critically severe observer of the behavior of others. He sharply censures the miscarriages and even the mistakes of ministers and professors, if an occasion offers, and speaks of these things, not weeping as the apostle did—but with pleasure, and labors to persuade himself, that the strictness so much talked of, is either a cloak of hypocrisy, or the fruit of superstition. True Christians seldom meet with more uncandid misconstruction, or undeserved reproach, than from those who, having once been their companions, afterwards desert them.

When the disorder is at this height, it is truly *dangerous*, and indeed, as to any human help, *desperate*. But power belongs to God. May it please him to remember in mercy those who are near unto death, to restore them to their right minds, and to recover them to himself. Otherwise, "it had been better for them not to have known the way of

righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them!"

COVETOUSNESS

October 2, 1795

"For of this you can be sure: that no *sexually immoral* or *impure* nor *covetousness* person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Ephesians 5:5

What is covetousness?

Covetousness is a **besetting** sin, from which few people are entirely free.

Covetousness is eminently a **deceitful** sin! It is decried and condemned in others—by multitudes who live in the habit of it themselves! It is very difficult to fix a conviction of this sin—upon those who are guilty of it!

Whether drunkards or profligates regard the warnings of the preacher or not, when he declares that those who persist in those evil practices, shall not inherit the kingdom of God—they know at least their own characters, and are sensible that they are the people intended.

But if the preacher adds, "nor the covetousness person—such a man is an idolater" —the covetous man usually sits unmoved, and is more

ready to apply the threatening to his neighbor—than to himself! If he is willing to entertain the minister sometimes at his table; if he now and then gives a few dollars to some charity—he does not suspect that he is liable to the charge of covetousness!

There are two words in the Greek Testament, which are rendered covetousness in our version. The one literally signifies, "the love of money"; the other, "a desire of more". The senses are indeed concurrent, for no man would *desire* more of that which he does not *love*; and as he who loves silver cannot be satisfied with the silver that he already possesses—he will of course desire more.

Money is generally loved and valued at first, as a means of procuring other things which appear desirable; but many, who begin thus, are brought at length to love money for its own sake. Such people are called *misers*. We meet with those who, so far from being benevolent to *others*—are cruel to *themselves*, and, though abounding in wealth, can hardly afford themselves the necessities of life. But a man may be very covetous, though, not being yet given up to this mental infatuation—he may congratulate himself, and thank God that "he is not a miser!"

I consider covetousness as the most generally prevailing and ensnaring sin, by which professors of the gospel, in our materialistic society, are hindered in their spiritual progress. A disposition deeply rooted in our fallen nature, strengthened by the custom of all around us, the power of habit, and the fascinating charm of wealth—is not easily counteracted.

If we are, indeed, genuine believers in Christ—we are bound by obligation, and required by our Scriptural rule—to set our affections on the things that are above, not on the things on the earth. Christ has called us out of the world, and cautioned us against conformity to

its spirit. While we are in the world—it is our duty, privilege, and honor, to manifest that grace—which has delivered us from the love of the world. Christians must indeed eat and drink, and may buy and sell, as other people do. But the principles, motives, and ends of their conduct, are entirely different—they are to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior, and to do all for His glory!

By His wisdom and providence, he places them in different situations, that the power and sufficiency of his grace may appear under a great variety of outward circumstances. He gives them **talents**, to some more, to others less; but all to be improved for him. Whether they are rich or poor, bond or free, they are so by his appointment—with which, if they cheerfully comply, they shall, in due time, be sensible that he chooses better for them, than they could have chosen for themselves.

The *language of faith*, when in exercise, will not be, "What is most conducive to my *temporal* ease and prosperity?" But "What will give me the best opportunity of glorifying him, who has bought me with his blood, and called me out of darkness into his marvelous light? Too much of my **time** has already been wasted—how shall I improve the *little uncertain remainder of my time* for his service? I am too short-sighted to judge for myself—but he has thus far determined it. I am where he has placed me; and the calling in which his mercy found me, (if it be a lawful one,) is that in which, for the present, I am to abide, as the best for me. When it ceases to be so, I may depend upon him to appoint me another. But, until then, I desire to be contented with such things as I have, and to be thankful for them. He knows my frame, my feelings, my needs, and my trials; he permits, yes, invites me to cast all my cares upon him. He assures me that he cares for me, and therefore I only wish to do or to suffer according to his will *today*, and to leave the concerns of *tomorrow* in

his hands. While I live—may I live for him! And when I die—may I go to him! May his grace be sufficient for me—and all shall be well."

The Christian knows, or should know, that it is not necessary to be rich, or to be admired or envied by the vain unthinking world—and that it is absolutely necessary for him to maintain peace of conscience, communion with God, and a cheerful activity of spirit in his service. And, as his gracious Lord accepts him, not according to what he actually *does*—but according to what he *would do* if he could, so that he who can only give a cup of cold water to a prophet, in the name of a prophet, should receive a prophet's reward; in this respect all his people, however differently situated, are exactly upon a par. Luke. 21:3-4.

But, alas! how many who profess to know and value the gospel are far otherwise minded! The chief mark of their profession is their attendance upon the Sunday service! At other times, and in other respects—they are not easily distinguished from the world. If their houses, furniture, tables, and other belongings, secure them from the suspicion of being misers, the manner in which they seek worldly things, sufficiently proves them to be covetous. If, when they can find leisure to speak of religion, they complain that their frames are low, and that they have but little comfort in the ways of God; this is the most favorable token we can find to encourage our hope that, in the midst of all their hurry, there may be a *latent sincerity* at the bottom. For how can it be otherwise, if they had a spark of spiritual life and grace in their hearts, while they attempt to look two ways at once, and to reconcile the incompatible claims of God and mammon? Their love of money, and the desire of more—are always in exercise. As to these, their frames seldom vary, from the beginning to the end of the year. They rise early, go to bed late, and *eat the bread of worry*—that

they may be able to vie with the world in their possessions, and to lay up snares, and thorns, and encumbrances for their children!

Often, when already possessed of a lawful employment, which affords a competence for a comfortable support, if opportunity offers, they eagerly catch at some other prospect of gain, though they thereby double their anxieties, and encroach still more upon that time (too little before) which they should afford to allot to the concerns of their souls. Such opportunities they call *providential openings*, and perhaps say they are thankful for them; not considering that such openings of Providence are frequently *temptations or tests*, which the Lord permits a man to meet with, to prove what is in his heart, and to try him, whether he will hold fast his integrity or not, and whether his affections be indeed set on the things above—or still cleave to the earth.

It is sometimes the pleasure of the Lord, to give a servant of his—what the world calls 'prosperity'. He places him in a line of life suited to his desire and ability, prepares a plain path before him, and, by a blessing upon his industry and economy, the man, perhaps, from small beginnings, increases in wealth, almost imperceptibly, with little other solicitude on his own part, than a *faithful attention to the duties of his calling* from day to day. Such a person is a public benefit. The Lord, who *gives* him riches, teaches him likewise how to *use* them. He chiefly values the increase of his property and influence, as they enlarge his sphere of Christian usefulness. He is ready and active to promote the cause of God in the world, and to relieve the needs and miseries of his fellow-creatures. He is eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; the friend of the fatherless and the widow. People of this character are to be found among us; but, compared with the bulk of professors, the world swallows up the most of them!

For those who, as the apostle expresses it, "*long to be rich,*" who will strain every nerve to load themselves with *thick clay*, and to be found in the list of those who gain much money—may, and often do, obtain the *poor reward* they seek. As in the case of Israel, when, not satisfied with *bread* from heaven, they importunately clamored for *meat* likewise; God gives them their desire—but sends leanness withal into their *souls*. They expose themselves to temptations and snares, to foolish passions and pursuits; and thus too many, who promised fair at the first setting out, are drowned in destruction and perdition! For it is written in the Scripture, that "no covetous man, who is an idolater, shall inherit the kingdom of God!" And the Scriptures cannot be broken!

At the best, if they do not finally perish, they are in great danger of erring from the faith, and certainly pierce themselves through with many sorrows—for the love of money is the root of all evil. We may err from the faith, without changing the form of our creed, or imbibing doctrinal errors. Faith is an active, powerful principle; it realizes things unseen, it leads to the throne of grace, it feeds upon the Word of life, it desires and obtains communion with God, and power from the Spirit of grace, by which it purifies the heart, works by love, and overcomes the world. These are the sure effects of faith; and he who does not in some measure experience them in himself, may have an *opinion*, a *notion* of the truths of the gospel, and may be right in *theory*; but he is either an utter stranger to the faith of God's people—or has greatly erred from it!

"For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows!" 1 Timothy 6:10. Who can enumerate the many sorrows with which the covetous and worldly-minded professor is pierced! Especially if it is the Lord's pleasure to be

gracious to him, and he purposes to bring him at last out of the snares in which he is entangled. Then, sooner or later, his schemes are broken; losses, crosses, disappointments, and anxieties, wear down his spirit. Improper connections, which he would form, because he would be rich, become thorns in his sides and in his eyes! He trusted in men—and men deceive him! He leaned upon a weak reed—which breaks, and he falls. Thus he finds that *the way of transgressors and backsliders is hard!* His distresses are aggravated by the voice of conscience, which will speak, and will be heard, "Have you not procured these things to yourself, in that you have forsaken the Lord your God, when he led you along the way?"

Covetousness, or the love of the world, is one great cause of the many trials we meet with in life. The principle of this evil is so strong in us, and so powerfully nourished by almost everything around us, that it is seldom suppressed, but by a course of sharp discipline. Many people have now reason to be thankful for those dispensations of Providence which once seemed most severe. If the Lord had not seasonably defeated their plans of life, withered their gourds, broken their cisterns, and wounded them where they were most keenly sensible—they might, yes, they would have gone on from bad to worse! But losses are gains, and the heaviest trials are mercies—when sanctified to bring us to our right minds, and to guide our feet into the paths of peace!

If therefore, my dear reader, you wish to avoid trouble, and to pass through life as smoothly as possible, take heed and beware of covetousness! If the Lord loves you, he will not lose you; and therefore he will beat you, as it were, in a mortar, if necessary, rather than permit that covetousness to remain in you which his soul abhors, and which, if it were to remain, would exclude you from his kingdom. He has said, and daily experience and observation confirm

his aphorism, "A man's life (the real comforts of it) consists not in the abundance of things which he possesses." Gold cannot communicate peace of mind, nor compensate for the lack of it. Surely those who are satisfied with a little of this world's goods, must be more happy than those who are not satisfied with a great deal. Remember likewise, that where much is given, much will be required; and seriously consider, what will it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul!

Conformity to the world

"Be not conformed to this world." Romans 12:2

Dear Sir,

You will perhaps be surprised to see my thoughts on your query in print, rather than to receive them by the post, as you expected. But as the subject of it is of general concern, I hope you will not be displeased that I have taken this method. It might be of considerable service in the present day, clearly to explain the force of the Apostle's precept, "Be not conformed to this world;" and to state the just boundary between a sinful compliance with the world, and that scrupulous singularity which springs from a self-righteous principle, and a contracted view of the spirit and liberty of the Gospel. To treat this point accurately, would require a treatise rather than a letter: I only undertake to offer you a few hints; and indeed, when the mind is formed to a spiritual taste, a simple desire to be guided by the Word and Spirit of God, together with a due attention to our own experience, will, in most practical cases, supersede the necessity of long and elaborate disquisitions.

By the world, in the passage alluded to, Rom. 12:2, I suppose the Apostle means **conformity to the men of the world**, in distinction from believers: these, not having the love of God in their hearts, or his fear before their eyes, are of course engaged in such pursuits and practices as are inconsistent with our holy calling, and in which we cannot imitate or comply with them, without hurting our peace and our profession. We are therefore bound to avoid conformity to them in all such instances; but we are not obliged to decline all interaction with the world, or to impose restraints upon ourselves, when the Scripture does not restrain us, in order to make us as unlike the world as possible. To instance in a few particulars.

It is not necessary, perhaps it is not lawful, wholly to renounce the society of the world. A mistake of this kind took place in the early ages of Christianity, and men (at first, perhaps, with a sincere desire of serving God without distraction) withdrew into deserts and uninhabited places, and wasted their lives at a distance from their fellow-creatures. But *unless we could flee from ourselves* likewise, this would afford us no advantage; so long as we carry our own wicked hearts with us, we shall be exposed to temptation, go where we will. Besides, this would be thwarting the end of our vocation. Christians are to be the salt and the lights of the world, conspicuous as cities set upon a hill; they are commanded to "let their light shine before men, that they, beholding their good works, may glorify their Father who is in heaven." This injudicious deviation from the paths of nature and providence, gave occasion at length to the vilest abominations; and men who withdrew from the world, under pretense of retirement, became the more wicked and abandoned as they lived more out of public view and observation.

Nor are we at liberty, much less are we enjoined, to renounce the duties of relative life, so as to become careless in the discharge of

them. Allowances should, indeed, be made for the distresses of people newly awakened, or under the power of temptation, which may for a time so much engross their thoughts as greatly to indispose them for their bounded duty. But, in general, **the proper evidence of true Christians is, not merely that they can talk about Divine things, but that, by the grace of God, they live and act agreeable to the rules of his word, in the state in which his providence has placed them,** whether as masters or servants, husbands or wives, parents or children; bearing rule, or yielding obedience, as in his sight. Diligence and fidelity in the management of temporal concerns, though observable in the practice of many worldly men, may be maintained without a sinful conformity to the world.

Neither are we required to refuse a moderate use of the comforts and conveniences of life, suitable to the station which God has appointed us in the world. The spirit of self-righteousness and will-worship works much in this way, and supposes that there is something excellent in long fasting, in abstaining from pleasant food, in wearing coarser clothes than is customary with those in the same rank of life, and in many other austerities and singularities not commanded by the word of God. And many people, who are in the main sincere, are grievously burdened with scruples respecting the use of lawful things.

It is true, there is need of a constant watch, lest what is lawful in itself becomes hurtful to us by its abuse. But these outward strictnesses may be carried to great lengths, without a spark of true grace, and even without the knowledge of the true God. The mortifications and austerities practiced by the Bramins in India are vastly more severe than the most zealous effects of modern superstition in our country. There is a strictness which arises rather

from ignorance than knowledge, is wholly taken up with externals, and gratifies the spirit of self as much in one way, as it seems to retrench it in another. A man may almost starve his body to feed his pride: but to those who fear and serve the Lord, every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the precept is very extensive and important. "Be not conformed to the world." As believers, we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Heaven is our country, and the Lord is our King. We are to be known and noticed as his subjects; and therefore it is his pleasure, that we do not speak the sinful language, or adopt the sinful customs, of the land in which we sojourn. We are not to conform to the world, as we did in the days of our ignorance. And though we have received the principles of grace, and have tasted of the goodness of the Lord, the admonition is still needful; for we are renewed but in part, and are liable to be drawn aside to our hurt by the prevalence of evil examples and customs around us.

We must not conform to the spirit of the world. As members of society, we have a part to act in it, in common with others. But if our business is the same, our principles and ends are to be entirely different. Diligence in our respective callings is, as I have already observed, commendable, and our duty; but not with the same views which stimulate the activity of the men of the world. If they rise early, and take rest late, their endeavors spring from and terminate in *self*, to establish and increase their own importance, to add house to house, and field to field, that, like the builders of Babel, they may get themselves a name, or provide means for the gratification of their sinful passions. If they succeed, they sacrifice to themselves; if they

are crossed in their designs, they are filled with anxiety and impatience; they either murmur or despond.

But a Christian is to pursue his lawful calling with an eye to the providence of God, and with submission to his wisdom. Thus, so far as he acts in the exercise of faith, he cannot be disappointed. He casts his care upon his Heavenly Father, who has promised to take care of him. What God gives, he receives with thankfulness, and is careful as a faithful steward to improve it for the furtherance of the cause of God, and the good of mankind. And if he meets with losses and crosses, he is not disconcerted, knowing that all his concerns are under a Divine direction; that the Lord whom he serves, chooses for him better than he could choose for himself; and that his best treasure is safe, out of the reach of the various changes to which all things in the present state are liable.

We must not conform to the maxims of the world. The world in various instances calls evil good, and good evil. But we are to have recourse to the law and to the testimony, and to judge of things by the unerring word of God, uninfluenced by the determination of the great, or the many. We are to obey God rather than man, though upon this account we may expect to be despised or reviled, to be made a gazing-stock or a laughing-stock to those who set his authority at defiance. We must bear our testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, avow the cause of his despised people, and walk in the practice of universal obedience, patiently endure reproaches, and labor to overcome evil with good. Thus we shall show that we are not ashamed of Him. And there is an hour coming when he will not be ashamed of us, who have followed him, and borne his cross in the midst of a perverse generation, but will own our worthless names before the assembled world.

We must not conform to the world in their amusements and diversions. We are to mix with the world so far as our necessary and providential connections engage us, so far as we have a reasonable expectation of doing or getting good, and no farther. "What fellowship has light with darkness, or what concord has Christ with Belial?" What does a believer have to do into those places and companies, where everything tends to promote a spirit of dissipation; where the fear of God has no place; where things are purposely disposed to inflame or indulge corrupt and sinful appetites and passions, and to banish all serious thoughts of God and ourselves? If it is our duty to redeem time, to walk with God, to do all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to follow the example which he set us when he was upon earth, and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling; it must of course be our duty to avoid a conformity with the world in those vain and sensual amusements, which stand in as direct contradiction to a spiritual frame of mind, as darkness to light.

The leading desires of every person under the influence of Gospel principles, will be, to maintain an habitual communion with God in his own soul, and to manifest the power of his grace in the sight of men. **So far as a Christian is infected by a conformity to the spirit, maxims, and sinful customs of the world, these desires will be disappointed.** Fire and water are not more opposite, than that peace of God which passes all understanding, and that poor precarious pleasure which is sought in a compliance with the world; a pleasure (if worthy the name) which grieves the Spirit of God, and stultifies the heart. Whoever, after having tasted that the Lord is gracious, has been prevailed on to make the experiment, and to mingle with the world's vanities, has certainly thereby brought a damp upon his experience, and indisposed himself for the exercise of prayer, and the contemplation of Divine truths. And if any are not

sensible of a difference in this respect, it is because the poison has taken a still deeper effect, so as to benumb their spiritual senses. Conformity to the world is the bane of many professors in this day. They have found a way, as they think, to serve both God and Mammon. But because they are double-minded, they are unstable; they make no progress; and, notwithstanding their frequent attendance upon ordinances, they are lean from day to day; a form of godliness, a scheme of orthodox notions, they may attain to, but they will remain destitute of the life, power, and comfort of piety, so long as they cleave to those things which are incompatible with it.

Conformity to the world is equally an obstruction in the way of those who profess a desire of glorifying God in the sight of men. Such professors do rather dishonor him. By their conduct, as far as in them lies, they declare, that they do not find the religion of the Gospel answer their expectations; that it does not afford them the satisfaction they once hoped for from it; and that therefore they are forced to seek relief from the world. They grieve the people of God by their compliances, and oftentimes they mislead the weak, and by their examples encourage them to venture upon the like liberties, which otherwise they dared not have attempted. They embolden the wicked likewise in their evil ways, while they see *a manifest inconsistency between their avowed principles and their practice*; and thus they cause the ways of truth to be evil spoken of. The length of this paper constrains me to conclude abruptly. May the Lord enable you and I to lay this subject to heart, and to pray that we may, on the one hand, rightly understand and prize our Christian liberty; and, on the other hand, be preserved from that growing evil—a sinful conformity to the world!

A letter from John Newton, which he had printed and distributed to every family in his church in Olney, in 1768

My dear friends,

Every person in our church has a place in my heart and prayers—but I cannot speak to each of you individually. Yet I am desirous to give full proof that I watch for the welfare of your souls; and likewise, (if it is possible,) to have a witness in every conscience, that none may plead ignorance of those things which it highly concerns them to know. I hope you will receive this paper in good part, as a *token of my love*, and read it with attention.

The great God, who appoints to all people "the bounds of their habitation," (Acts 17:26) has been pleased to fix your place in a place favored with the light of the gospel. This is a great and distinguishing privilege in itself; but it may be abused, and, if it is—will certainly aggravate your guilt and condemnation!

"JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED!" (1 Corinthians 2:2) is preached among you! This *foundation* (1 Corinthians 3:11) which GOD Himself has provided, whereon poor sinners may build their eternal hope, is set before you. You are warned of the evil of sin, of the wrath of God denounced against transgressors, and of the impossibility of being saved without that true faith, which, being of the operation of GOD, purifies the heart, "and works by love." And the great blessings of salvation, immortality, pardon, justification, adoption, holiness, perseverance, and eternal glory—are preached among you, as the sure and inseparable effects of a living faith in the Son of God. (Col. 2:12. Act. 15:9. Galatians 5:6)

In a little time we must all give an *account* of our improvement of the opportunities we are favored with. This thought, joined to a consideration of the state of our church, leads me to offer a word in

season to each of you. Perhaps there is hardly a single person who will not be more or less concerned under one or other of the following particulars.

1. If *God* has taught you the truths I have mentioned above, if you have true faith in His Son Jesus Christ, or if, convinced of its necessity, you are humbly and diligently seeking it in the use of the means He has appointed; I may address you in the angel's language to Mary, "Hail, you who are highly favored!" (Luke 1:28) for if you *have* this faith, you have the promise and pledge of everlasting life; (John. 6:47) or if you account yourself but a *seeker*, the word of the living God is engaged for your success; for He has said, "Those who seek—shall find." (Mat. 7:7)

I trust that you will readily receive this word of exhortation. You are called with a "high and holy calling;" (Phi. 3:14, 2 Timothy 1:9) watch and pray, therefore, that you may be preserved from the *snares of the world*, and the *devices of Satan*. That no *errors* in judgment, no *sinful indulgence* in practice, nothing contrary to the spirituality, love, gentleness, and patience, which befit the gospel of Christ, may defile your conscience, rob you of your comfort, or "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:2) through your miscarriage.

You are called out of darkness into marvelous light," (1 Peter 2:9) that by your profession God may be glorified. Therefore keep close to His Word as your rule; be constant in your application at the *throne of grace*; attend diligently upon His public ordinances, that thus by waiting upon the Lord—your strength may be renewed, (Isaiah 40:31) and "your light" may shine before men" (Mat. 5:16) to His praise.

That justice, truth, fidelity, sobriety, and diligence, may adorn the exercise of your ordinary calling; and that you may fill up your

relations in life as a master or servant, a husband or a wife, a parent or a child, in such a manner as may and will be expected from one who has "tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1 Peter 2:3) Beware of a worldly, or selfish, or proud, or peevish, or passionate spirit! If you give way to any of these evils, you will walk uncomfortably yourself, you will grieve or discourage others, and you will open the mouths of the wicked to "blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called." (Jam. 2:7)

2. But if you are one of those who account the gospel of Christ as a burden, and can hardly be brought to give it a patient hearing; what can I say to you? You are already prejudiced against all I can offer, and perhaps account me "an enemy because I tell you the truth." Yet I would gladly persuade you of my good-will for you. I have no complaint to make of you upon my own account; having received no personal incivility even from those who are dissatisfied with my ministry. Though you are unwilling to hear me from the pulpit—yet let me expostulate a minute with you in this way. If I cannot prove my doctrine by the Scripture, and even by the articles and public offices of our own church—you have reason to be displeased with me. But why will you venture to reject, what you must confess may at least possibly be the truth? I am sure you cannot disprove the general subjects of my ministry, not even to the satisfaction of your own minds, if you will sit leisurely down, and examine them by the New Testament.

It is, indeed, easy to turn off my inquiry with a laugh, while you are in health and good spirits; but if you can remember a time when you have been sick, and apprehensive of the approach of death, probably you then felt your confidence fail, and was not so sure of the safety of your state as you once thought yourself. Such a time *will* come again. You may be cut off by a sudden stroke, and you must eventually die.

You must experience that untried moment, and render up your soul to the solemn tribunal of God. Oh, then, beware of resting your eternal hopes upon any less authority than God's Word! You may now be supported by others; but no teacher, or friend, or favorite author, can or will stand between you and your eternal Judge. You may *live* in a crowd—but you must *die* alone. What you think of yourself, or what others may think of you—is of small consequence; the main question is, "What you are in the sight of the Great Judge, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden!" (1 Corinthians 4:3.) For, according to His unalterable sentence—you must stand or fall to eternity. Alas! if our gospel is true, and you live and die a stranger to it—it will be more tolerable in that day for those who never heard of the name of Jesus, than for you! (Mat. 11:22).

3. There are too many people among us who abstain from the **public worship**, not so much from any particular objection they have to the doctrines of the gospel—as from *an inconsiderate and worldly turn of mind*, which keeps them in a general *neglect* of true religion.

Many associate for drink and worldly pleasures, to the grief of all serious people, and in defiance to the commandments of God. If I could have suppressed these enormities, I would. But, I can only give notice as a minister and a watchman, that "for these things the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience!" (Ephesians 5:6.) If you, my reader, are concerned in these practices, let me entreat you to consider what you are doing. Why will you "provoke the Lord to jealousy?" (1 Corinthians 10:22.) Are you stronger than He? If your whole dependence was upon what we call a *great man*, you would not dare to willfully and publicly disobey him! And can you think it safe to trifle with the *great God*? Do you not know that your life, your

health, the peace of your family, and the success of your labor—all depend upon Him? Are you not afraid, lest by openly affronting His Majesty—that you should provoke Him to send a curse upon all your concerns, and to blast all your endeavors? (Hag. 1:6-9)

Every rebellion against God makes our state more desperate, *sin* being in its nature, *progressive*. How many have made a confession to this purpose—at the gallows? And how many families may be found that are as full of misery, dissension, and confusion, as they are destitute of the fear and worship of God? Alas! I shall tremble for you if you do not lay this admonition to heart! I shall fear lest you provoke the Lord to give you up to a reprobate mind, or lest, in the course of His providence, He should set some mark upon you, to teach others by your example, that it is a dreadful thing to sin against the Lord! (Romans 2:4) But, though His patience should bear with you to the last—and to the last you should despise it, yet *death* will finally summon you to judgment, unless by His grace you are brought to repentance! Though you may say, "Peace, peace" to yourself—sudden destruction will then come upon you, and you shall not be able to escape! (1Th. 5:3)

If you are one of those who do not wholly neglect the public worship of God—but accustom yourself to attend only once on Sundays, give me leave to ask you, or rather to desire that you would ask your own conscience, whether you have sufficient excuse for not attending twice? I know the circumstances of many families, such as sickness, young children, etc. will necessarily confine some people at home. But a due allowance for these impediments, will by no means account for the great difference between our congregations in the *morning* and in the *afternoon* of the same day.

Now, if you have not a lawful hindrance to plead, consider whether the same reasons that require your presence at the public worship once, are not equally strong for your being there both parts of the day. Why do you go at all? Is it not to join with others in paying homage to the great God? But by doing this once only, where opportunity and the example of others invite you twice—you contradict yourself, and act as if you thought it was sometimes your duty to join in worship, and sometimes not worth your while. Or, do you go with a hope of receiving good for your souls? Why then should you at any time be willing to stay away? Perhaps the opportunity you miss might have been made peculiarly useful to you. At least the Lord may justly punish your frequent neglect, by withholding His blessing when you do attend. And this may be one reason why you have attended morning worship so long—yet to so little purpose.

4. It is with grief that I observe how generally the **Word of God** is disregarded among us, though few can plead ignorance of His will. The Scripture denounces a woe against those "who are mighty to drink strong drink," (Isaiah 5:22) and against "him who urges strong drink upon his neighbor to put him to shame." (Hab. 2:15) The Scripture declares, "Everyone who swears shall be cut off with a curse." (Zec. 5:3, Exo. 20:7) These threatenings are frequently repeated in the ears of those who have not entirely cast off the mere *form of religion*. Yet I fear that intemperance, riot, and profaneness, visibly gain strength from year to year. If you will go on in those practices—remember I this day take God and your consciences to witness, that "I am innocent of your blood!" (Acts 20:26) As I have forewarned you before, so I tell you again, "*The wrath of God hangs over you!* Unless you repent—you will surely perish!" (Luke 13:3-5) It will be a great aggravation if you perish "with your eyes open!"

Think, I beseech you, before it is too late, of that awful passage, "Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations! When such a person hears the words of this oath, he invokes a blessing on himself and therefore thinks, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." The Lord will never be willing to forgive him; His wrath and zeal will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven!" (Deu. 29:18-20)

There is one sin too frequent in the parish, which upon this occasion I think it especially necessary to mention. Paul assures us, (agreeably to many other passages of Scripture,) that "God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery!" (Hebrews 13:4) Adultery, which implies a breach of the marriage-contract, is so dreadful, so irreparable an evil, and as such condemned even by the heathen who know not God—that I would hope none of you are chargeable with it! If you are, however you may conceal your wickedness from your fellow-creatures, you cannot hide it from God! His *eye* is upon you, and His *justice* will surely overtake you! Indeed, if He is pleased to give you faith in the name of Jesus, and a sincere repentance of your crimes, there is yet hope, for "the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin!" (1Jo. 1:7) Otherwise I testify to you from His Word, that "you shall surely perish!" He who said, "You shall not commit adultery," (Exo. 20:14) will not hold you guiltless in the day of His wrath!"

The apostle joins *whoredom* with adultery, and has expressly inserted *fornication* in the black list of those sins which will certainly exclude from a place in the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:19) If you have been guilty, may the Lord fix a sense of your sin upon your conscience while you are reading, that you may

not think it a light matter—but may instantly humble yourself before Him, and flee to the Refuge provided for helpless sinners in the gospel! (Hebrews 6:18) If by His restraining grace and providence, you have been hitherto preserved from this iniquity, you have reason to praise Him. And oh, pray to Him, (I speak more especially to young people,) that you may be enabled to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." (1 Peter 2:11)

It is your duty and interest to flee from this hateful evil, and to watch against the temptations which lead to it, as you would avoid a pestilence! By complying with it, you hazard all your peace and comfort in this life, as well as sin against the great God. If an immoral relationship between single people does not issue in marriage, a long train of mischiefs is the usual consequence; shame, remorse, misery, and very often total ruin, especially on the woman's part. And, even if the parties are afterwards married, though this may lessen the scandal in the sight of *men*—the sin committed against *God* remains the same. And an occasion is opened for such reflections and suspicions, as frequently embitter the peace and destroy the confidence and affection—in which they might otherwise have lived.

5. I observe likewise, with great concern—a spirit of open impiety and infidelity which spreading among some people. They are bold to "proclaim their sin as Sodom;" (Isaiah 3:9) they cannot be content with the practice of wickedness, or with tempting others to partake of their evil deeds—but they are prompted to scoff at the truths of the gospel, and to ridicule and revile those who will not "run with them into the same excess of sin." (1 Peter 4:4) If anyone, of this unhappy turn, should read this paper, I would take the opportunity to tell you—that I pity you, and pray for you. I well know the gall and wormwood (Lam. 3:19) of your state—for it was once my own. I am

not surprised at anything you say or do. You sin against the light, and this makes you desperate! "It is hard to kick against the goads." (Act. 9:5) I can tell from my own past experience, that your *heart* and your *language* do not always agree. You are sometimes constrained to reverence the people you affect to despise; and often, when you boast of jollity and pleasure, you feel something within which makes you wish you could change conditions with a dog or a toad! You understand what I mean.

Why then should you remain in this *miserable bondage*, where there is One who is able to set you free? Perhaps you have concluded that you have gone too far to stop; that you have sinned with too high a hand to be forgiven. A secret despair of this kind, is Satan's great engine, by which he hurries many sinners to the most dreadful sins! But may I not give my own case for your encouragement against such a conclusion? You have probably heard that I was once "a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man!" (1Ti. 1:13-16) I was so, indeed, to a degree I cannot express! But I obtained mercy! The exceeding abundant grace of our Lord Jesus Christ brought me out of that dreadful state, and in His providence He has placed me among you, that you may have a proof before your eyes, of His gracious declaration, that "Every sin or blasphemy can be forgiven!" "There is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared!" (Mat. 12:31, Psalm 130:4)

Oh, that I could prevail with you to seek Him while He is to be found, to submit to Him before the gate of mercy is quite shut! Then "I am sure iniquity should not be your ruin!" (Ezekiel. 18:30) for "He is able to save all who come unto God by Him—to the uttermost!" (Hebrews 7:25)

Let me give you one caution: do not make the Scripture, or the people who love it, the subjects of your wanton mirth. "Scoff no more—or your punishment will be even greater!" (Isaiah 28:22) A common proverb says, "It is harmful to play with sharp-edged tools!" I am sure it may be applied in the present case. If the cause you despise is the cause of God, it will be a dreadful thing to be found fighting against Him!

6. There remains a considerable number to whom I have not yet spoken; who may know they are not true believers, yet are tolerably regular in their attendance upon the means of grace, and are not habitually guilty of gross and open sins. I commend you for your readiness to hear the gospel, and rejoice that it has some influence upon your conduct. But I would caution you against resting in religious privileges, or thinking yourself safe, because you have escaped the wicked abominations in which you see some others live. Every sin—though not so heinous in the judgment of man—is sufficient to damn the soul. If you "*love the world*—the love of the Father is not in you. (1Jo. 2:15) "To be *carnally-minded* is death." (Romans 8:6) "*Covetousness* is idolatry." (Col. 3:5) If you are under the prevailing power of passion, pride, and resentment, you are strangers to the grace of God. (Galatians 5:20) In a word, "if you have not the Spirit of Christ, you do not belong to Him." (Romans 7:9) A *mere form of godliness*, without the power, (2 Timothy 3:5) will leave you helpless and hopeless!"

Can you be content to be no more than *chaff among the wheat*, (Mat. 3:12) to converse and worship with the people of God for a season here on earth—and then to be separated from them forever? Can you be content to see those whom you know and love, your friends and relatives, received into the kingdom at last—and you yourselves shut out! (Luke 13:2, 5-30) How awful will your disappointment be! May

the Lord awaken you to a diligent search into your own hearts, and into His holy Word, and not allow you to take up with anything short of a real and saving conversion!

Look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, (Hebrews 12:2) who is exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and pardon, life and immortality! (Act. 5:31) And remember you have His faithful promise, "Him who comes unto me, I will never cast out." (John. 6:37)

I can truly say, my dear friends, that "my heart's desire, and prayer to God for you, is that you may be saved!" (Romans 10:1) As some, I fear, have hitherto heard in *vain*, and some will not hear me at all—I have chosen this method to address you all. I hope none will be offended, for I would not willingly offend even a child. I hope I can appeal to yourselves, that God has given me a desire to live peaceably with all men, and to the utmost of my power, to promote your eternal welfare. "What I want is not your possessions —but you!" (2 Corinthians 12:14)

In a little while "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." (2 Corinthians 3:10) There *I* must give an account of my ministry—and *you* must account for the privileges with which you have been favored. When I think of the solemnities of that day, and the worth of your immortal souls—I am at a loss for words suitable to my desires on your behalf. "I beseech you by the tender *mercies* of our God," (Romans 12:1) I warn you by His approaching *terrors*, (2 Corinthians 5:11) that you do not receive the gospel of God in vain! (2 Corinthians 6:1) And, though *I* cannot expect to prevail on you all, yet I write in hope, that the blessing from the *Lord* will make the reading of this paper useful to some. And, if it is so, even one to

person—I esteem it an over-payment for all the labors of my whole life.

And now I commend you to God, to the Word of His grace, and to the teaching of His Spirit. (Act. 20:32) I make it my earnest request to the favored few who know the Lord, and have received the spirit of prayer, that in your supplications at the throne of grace, you will frequently bear in remembrance,

Your affectionate friend and servant in the gospel of Christ,
John Newton

A letter from John Newton, which he had printed and distributed to every family in his church in London, in 1781

"I beg you to listen to me patiently!" Acts 26:3

My dear friends,

It being impracticable to write separately and distinctly to every person in the church, I offer you this testimony of my sincere regard for your best welfare. And I wish, while I express myself with the freedom to observe the same respect and tenderness, as if I had an opportunity of conversing personally with each of you.

My *income* from the parish is settled, and regularly and readily paid. I am well satisfied with it; and only desire that you may be benefited by the ministry which you contribute to support. I acknowledge likewise, with thankfulness to God and to you, that in the fellowship I have had among you—I have never received the least personal incivility or unkindness from anyone! Though I cannot but know and lament, that the subject-matter of my preaching is not pleasing to

many of you; and, though several steps I have thought it my duty to take, must appeal, to some of you—as unnecessary and troublesome innovations, I have met with no opposition or ill-will. Your conduct has, in this respect, been worthy of the politeness and kindness which distinguish you.

The only cause of *complaint*, or rather of *grief*, which you have given me, is—that so many of those to whom I earnestly desire to be useful, refuse me the pleasure of seeing them at church every Sunday. My concern does not arise from the lack of hearers. If either a numerous congregation, or the respectable characters of many of the individuals who compose it, could satisfy me—I would then be satisfied. But I must grieve, while I see so few of my own parishioners among them. Let me entreat your favorable attention, while I respectfully and affectionately expostulate on this point.

The general design of my ministry in this city, might, and I trust would have been answered, if it had pleased God to place me in some other church; but He saw fit to fix me among you. This appointment gives you a preference in my regard, and makes me studiously solicitous to promote your best welfare; and likewise it gives you a more immediate and particular service to you, than to others. However little worthy of your notice in any other view, if I am a servant of God, a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, if I speak the truth in love—how can I but be *pained* at the thought, that many to whom the word of salvation is sent (Acts 13:26) refuse to hear it, and reject the counsel of God against themselves! (Luke 7:30)

When I consider the progress of *infidelity* in the present day, I cannot but fear, that there may be some among you who absent themselves from the church, not so much from a dislike of what may be called my doctrines, or my sentiments—as from a disregard to the

Christian religion in general. I know how to pity people of this unhappy sentiment, for it was too long my own sentiment. It is not only a *dangerous* state—but an *uncomfortable* state; for, notwithstanding their utmost reasonings and endeavors, they cannot wholly avoid painful apprehensions, lest the Bible, which they *wish* to be false—should prove to be the truth!

It was thus with me, and it must, in the nature of things, be thus with every unbeliever. To *doubt* or *deny* the truth of Christianity is too common; but to *demonstrate* that it is false, is an utter impossibility! I labored long in the attempt—but, when I least expected it, I met with evidence that overpowered my resistance; and the Bible which I had despised, removed my skepticism. He against whom I had hardened myself, was pleased to spare me! And I now live to tell you, that there is forgiveness with God—that he may be feared! (Psalm 130:4)

But the greater part of you, I am persuaded, will agree with me thus far at least—that the Scripture is a divine Revelation. But do not some of you *act* inconsistently with your acknowledged *principles*? Can you reconcile your *conduct*—to the *precepts* of God, or to the character of those who fear and love Him, as described either in the Old or New Testament? If you have children—you expect them to obey you. And do you profess yourselves to be the children of God—and yet allow yourselves in the breach of His known commandments? The habits of business or amusement in which you live, not only engross your time and thoughts during the rest of the week—but indispose you for the due observation of our church services. You have engagements of another kind, which will not admit of your regular attendance on the public worship of God; and, if you constrain yourself to be present occasionally, the light which a faithful preacher forces upon your conscience offends you, and

makes you willing to catch at every pretense which may furnish you with the shadow of an excuse for not hearing him again!

But this is not the character of all who have withdrawn themselves. Some of you have not forsaken the public worship; you attend at *other* churches, are ready to complain that you have been driven from your own. If you have candor to allow that possibly I mean well, yet the manner of my preaching is so different from what you were formerly accustomed to, and from what you approve, that, after having heard me, and perhaps more than once, you have been constrained to seek new places of worship. If I venture to plead with you upon this ground, it is not without being aware of the delicacy of the subject. It will seem like pleading my own cause. But I am conscious that I would not trouble you with a single line—if it were not for *your* sakes, and with a desire of obviating such misapprehensions as I truly believe you cannot retain without disadvantage to yourselves.

As a Christian minister, and preaching to professing hearers, I not only take my text from the Scriptures—but likewise draw from thence the proofs and illustrations of what I advance in my sermons. I frequently, yes constantly, appeal to the Bible—the acknowledged standard and touchstone of all true religious sentiments. As a minister of the church of England, when speaking to the professed members of that church, I might likewise appeal to the current doctrine expressed in our liturgy and articles; but I seldom do it, because having, as I conceive, the highest authority, the Holy Scripture, on my side, I need no other.

If you could be certain, that with respect to the points wherein we differ, that the Scriptures are for you and against me—then your refusal to hear me would be justifiable. But otherwise it behoves

you to be cautious, lest, while you think you only reject what appears to you novel or impertinent, your contempt should unhappily fall upon the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, and of Christ Himself. I must magnify my office. (Romans 11:13) On other occasions, I wish to demean myself as the least of all, and the servant of all; but, when I stand in the pulpit, I speak in the name and under the authority of Him, whom we believe will shortly come to be our Judge, and who has said, "He who despises you, despises Me." (Luke 10:16)

I mean not to take up your time, at present, with a detail or a discussion of *my doctrines*. I offered a brief outline of my thoughts and aims in the first sermon I preached among you, and which was printed solely with the design of presenting it to you; though by a mistake which gave me pain at the time, it became more public than I intended. To the profession I then made, I have, by the goodness of God, been enabled invariably to conform. I doubt not but I have spoken the truth. (Ephesians 4:15) I have endeavored to speak it in love. It is true, I have not dared to *disguise* or *palliate* my principles. I account it a great mercy to me, that I have not been influenced by the *fear* or the *favor* of men. But my conscience bears me witness, that so far as truth and duty would admit—I have studied to avoid whatever might give you needless offence or pain.

When I came to this church, not being altogether a stranger to what is called *the world*, and to the maxims prevalent in *genteel life*, I could not promise myself very genteel acceptance as a preacher. I knew that if I would be *faithful* to Scripture and my conscience, that some of my hearers must be displeased. But, though I was constrained to risk your displeasure, I have been solicitous not to needlessly provoke it, or to lay any unnecessary difficulties either in your way, or in my own.

Many people whose good sense and liberal education exempt or free them from *prejudices* of other kinds—are frequently much under the power of *religious prejudices*. We *lament* this, more than we *wonder* at it. The reason is obvious. In *temporal* concerns they examine and judge for themselves. But in *religious* matters, they are content to let others judge for them, and (if I may so speak) to *swim with the stream of a prevailing opinion*. To this cause—I must ascribe some of the *objections* that are made to my ministry.

In almost every age and country where Christianity has been professed, some *hard name* or *term of reproach* has been imposed upon those who ventured to maintain a more evangelical strain of doctrine, or a stricter course of conduct—than was agreeable to the spirit of the times in which they lived. Even the name 'Christian', as honorable as we may now think it, was first used by the heathen, as a stigma, a term of the utmost contempt and hatred! Then Christians were, by common consent, reputed the off-scouring and filth of all things. (1 Corinthians 4:13) In a like manner, *terms of reproach* were applied by the papists—to scorn those whom God honored as His instruments in freeing our forefathers from the shackles of popery, by introducing that light of truth which issued in the Reformation.

Men of the same spirit were afterwards branded in protestant nations with the terms of reproach, such as *Pietist*, *Puritan* or *Methodist*. I have not hitherto met with a person who could give me a definition or precise idea of what is generally intended by these words, by those who use it to express their disapprobation. Until I do, I am at a loss whether to confess or deny that I am (what some account me) a *Methodist*. If it is supposed to include anything, whether in principle or conduct, unsuitable to the character of a Christian minister—I may, and I do, disown it. And yet it is probable, that some of my parishioners, hearing and easily taking it for

granted, that I am a Methodist, think it a sufficient proof that it cannot be worth their while to hear me.

That I may not disgust and weary my hearers by the *length* of my sermons, I carefully endeavor not to exceed three quarters of an hour, at those seasons when I have most reason to hope for the presence of my parishioners. At other times, I allow myself a longer term; but even this, I understand, is thought too long. If I considered my preaching only as a *customary appendage*, without which I could not, with a good grace, collect my pay—we would not long differ upon this point. So far as *brevity* would be pleasing to you—it would cost me little trouble to please. But, if the proper ends of preaching are to instruct, to admonish, to exhort, and to persuade; if the great truths of Scripture are to be explained, illustrated, and applied; if the various known or probable states and cases of the several people who compose our congregation are to be attended to; in a word, if, as a preacher, I am conscientiously to endeavor to save myself and those who hear me; (1Ti. 4:16) then I confess I know not how to answer these ends, were I to limit myself to a much shorter space than I do!

And, sometimes, when my heart has been deeply impressed with a sense of the worth of souls, the brevity and uncertainty of life, and the solemnity of that hour when both preachers and hearers must give an account of themselves to God—I have perhaps, in defiance of my previous determination, been constrained to exceed it a few minutes, though but seldom.

I am persuaded you are mistaken, when you think the length of my discourses is the cause of your dissatisfaction. It is not so much the *length*, as the *subject-matter* which wearies you. It is possible I could, if I dared, preach a sermon, which, though it exceeded three quarters of an hour—you would not think too long. Many people can

afford their attention for several hours to some vain entertainment without weariness, whose patience is quickly exhausted under a sermon, where the principles of Scripture are plainly enforced, and a faithful application of them is addressed to the conscience!

I lay no claim to the honor of being a polished orator; nor do I expect, or even wish, to engage your attention by the elegance of my words. If I possessed abilities of this kind, I would decline the use of them. I must speak to the *unlearned* as well as to the *wise*—and therefore my principal aim is to be *understood*. Yet I would hope that I am not justly chargeable with speaking nonsense, or expressing myself with a levity or carelessness unsuitable to the pulpit, or disrespectful to the congregation. But, alas! there are too many hearers, who seem more desirous of *entertainment*, than of real benefit from a *Christian sermon*!

They do not thus act in the affairs of common life. Were they to consult a physician or a lawyer, they would not be content with listening to some opinion upon a needless point of law, or upon a case of medicine in which they themselves had no personal concern. It is their own case they expect should be considered. But, when they come to church, if the discourse is clever, and the elocution of the preacher is pleasant—it suffices them. And the less the subject comes home to their personal concernment, the more they are pleased with it. That is, they are disposed to be pleased with the preacher—if he says nothing to make them displeased with themselves!

Another objection which I must likewise treat as a prejudice is, that I am an *extemporary* preacher. The practice of reading sermons to a public assembly, has been hitherto peculiar to the English nation. Burnet observes, that it took its rise soon after the dawn of the Reformation among us. Latimer and other great men, whose names,

now that they are dead, are mentioned with some respect, were, when living, treated by many as if they had been *enthusiasts*. They were contemptuously styled *Gospellers*, and preaching in tumultuous times, when there were insurrections in different parts of the kingdom, they were traduced as our Savior and His apostles had been before them, and charged with having a design to foment sedition by their sermons! The preachers not only disavowed the charge—but were led to *write* their discourses, that they might, if necessary, confute their slanderers, by producing what they had actually delivered. The like accusations, and the like suspicions, in some succeeding reigns, rendered the same precaution expedient. At length the *custom of writing down the whole sermon*, became general and established. In most, if not in all *other* parts of Christendom, a man who would attempt to read his sermon from the pulpit, would find but few hearers; and would be judged disqualified for the office of a preacher. Insomuch that those who after having previously considered their subject, are not able to speak upon it with some degree of readiness, are obliged not only to *write* their sermons—but to submit to the burdensome task of committing them to *memory*; for reading them would not be endured.

With us, on the contrary, the prejudice in favor of reading the sermon is so strong, that many people can form no expectation of sense, argument, or coherence, from a man who preaches without notes. They will require little more proof of his being unworthy of their notice, than to be told he is an extempore speaker. Here again, in the concerns of common life, they judge and act otherwise. There is little doubt but the theaters would soon be much less frequented, if the performers were to appear with notebooks in their hands, and each one to read his respective part. And perhaps the theater is the only place where a public speaker would be much admired, if it were

known that he spoke neither more nor less than he had previously determined to say.

In parliamentary debates, and in pleadings in our courts of justice, the occurrence of unexpected replies and objections, and other new circumstances, renders it necessary that a man should be so far master of his subject and his thoughts, as to be able to accommodate himself to those sudden turns, which often lead him into a train of discussions and arguments, which could not be premeditated, because such occasions could not be foreseen. If this habit and facility of *speaking off the cuff*, and applying principles of general knowledge to particular subjects and incidents as they offer—is allowed, approved, and even required in other public speakers, why should it be supposed that the preacher is the only person who cannot, or must not, express his thoughts—but in that order, and in those words, in which he has previously *written* them?

Is not *divinity* a subject sufficiently copious? Are not the topics which the Scriptures afford, well suited, by their importance, certainty, and authority, to awaken the strongest emotions, and to draw forth the highest exertions of which the human mind is capable? Shall the management of the contested claim of a house or a field, or the interests of contending political parties, be deemed of such consequence as to engage the attention and admiration of hearers? And shall a minister of the gospel, when called by his office to unfold the *wonders of redemption*, or to enlarge on the solemn themes of judgment, heaven and hell—be thought the only man who has chosen a subject incapable of justifying his earnestness, or of furnishing him with such thoughts and expressions upon the spot, as the most judicious part of his congregation need not hear? Certainly, if the Bible is true, a minister must have the same advantage of all other people who speak in a public character. His subject is more

weighty, and of infinitely more concern to his hearers. He speaks in the name of God, and has an express promise of the assistance of His Holy Spirit, if not to supersede his faculties, yet to influence, animate, and guide them, to bring things seasonably to his remembrance, and to apply them to the heart with a divine energy!

We know that it is so in fact; and though we are slighted, and perhaps despised, by many, there are others who receive our testimony with joy, and will acknowledge that what the world esteems the *foolishness of preaching*, (1 Corinthians 1:21) has, by the blessing of God, made them wise unto salvation. (2 Timothy 3:15)

I earnestly entreat you, my beloved friends, seriously to consider these things. In the midst of the various sentiments and opinions which prevail, it is at least certain that we are all *mortal*; and that life is not only *short*—but highly *precarious*. If you believe the Scriptures, you acknowledge, that after *death* there is an appointed *judgment*, followed by an unchangeable, *everlasting state*. If so, should you not carefully examine the ground of your hope, and fear even the possibility of a mistake, which, if not rectified before death—will then be fatal and without remedy?

If you would not sign a lease or a contract without examining it for yourselves, why will you venture your eternal soul implicitly upon the prevailing opinions of those around you? Especially, when our Lord Himself has told us, that whoever may be right, *the many* are undoubtedly wrong! "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and there are *many* who go through it!" (Mat. 7:13) If for the present you seem confirmed in your manner of thinking and living, by the numbers, names, and examples, of those with whom you agree; yet consider, that you must soon be separated from them all. Not one of them will

be able to answer for you to God, in the day of judgment. You may *live* in a throng—but you must *die* alone.

Religious subjects are seldom the chosen topics of conversation, in what is usually called *good company*; if occasionally introduced, how superficially are they treated, yet how instantly are they decided upon, and then how readily dismissed! But sooner or later their importance will be known. The Scripture is the rule by which we must all be judged at last; it is therefore our wisdom to judge ourselves by it now. Would you be persuaded to do this, praying to God for that assistance which you need to direct your inquiries, and which He has promised He will afford to those who ask Him—it would have a happy effect upon your principles and your peace. Search and read for yourselves, to see—if the Scripture does not speak to all mankind as in a state of condemnation; (Romans 2:19) if it affords us any hope of deliverance—but for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ; (Acts 4:12) if it intimates any method of being saved through Him—but by a faith (Mark 16:16) wrought by the operation of God, and evidenced by a temper of love, and a habit of cheerful obedience to His precepts (Col. 2:12, Galatians 5:6, 1 Peter 1:2) If these points, which comprise the general scope of my preaching, are contained and taught in the Bible—then they ought not to be spoken against.

I have no selfish interest to forward by this address, except that interest which I feel in your welfare. I have no favor to solicit from you—but that you would attend to the things which pertain to your eternal happiness. I can truly say, "What I want is not your possessions—but you!" (2 Corinthians 12:14) Though I am not indifferent to your good opinion, so far as respects my integrity and moral character, yet it is a small thing with me to be judged by any man's judgment. Nor would your united approbation content me,

except I could hope it was founded in your cordial acceptance of the gospel which I preach.

I have taken this method, as it seemed the only one in my power of acquainting some of you with my sentiments, which it highly concerns you to know; not because they are mine—but (I speak it with confidence) because they are true, and of the utmost importance. However amiable and benevolent you are in your private characters, unless you are born again, (John 3:3) born from above, delivered from the love and spirit of the world, (Galatians 1:4) and made partakers of the love and spirit of the Lord Jesus, (Romans 8:9) you cannot be accepted by Him in the great approaching day of His appearance. My heart longs for your salvation; but whether you will hear or whether you will forbear, I must take your consciences to witness, that I have been *faithful* to you. If after this warning any of you should finally perish—I am clear of your blood! (Acts 20:26)

Permit me to make one request. It is not likely that I shall ever trouble you in this way again, and therefore I would entreat you to preserve this paper. If it makes no impression on you at present, a more favorable season may come. If you pay but little attention to it in your *prosperity*, a time of *affliction* may invite you to peruse it again. If you regard it not while I am *living*—you may, should you survive me, read it more carefully after my decease.

It is however probable, that some of you will not survive me. *Death* may be even at your door! If the thought of such a *visitant* is unwelcome to you, it is owing to a secret consciousness that you are not prepared for it, and therefore you seek refuge from the painful apprehension, in a round of business or pleasure; perhaps, for the present, with too much success. Yet, sooner or later, the hour you dread must come! "It is *appointed* for all men once to *die*—and after

death comes the *judgment*." There we shall all meet. May the Lord God so influence your minds now, that our meeting then may be comfortable and happy!

Thus far I have written chiefly to those who absent themselves from the church. But I thank God I am not wholly deserted by my parishioners. With regard to those who have patience and candor to *hear* me, I have a hope that what may now seem harsh and difficult in my sermons, may hereafter approve itself to their judgment. No person in the congregation can be more averse from the doctrines which I now preach—than I myself once was! This gives me encouragement for others, especially when they are willing to attend on the means which God has promised to bless. For faith comes by hearing. (Romans 10:17) If I have at any time, contrary to my intention, uttered a single sentence in my own spirit, or that might give them just cause of offence, I would be glad, if I knew it, to ask their pardon.

Some of you there are, (may God increase the number,) who not only hear—but *approve*, because they have an experience in their own hearts that I speak the truth. They have felt the evil of sin—and the necessity of a Savior. They have received the, record God has given of His Son, and place their whole dependence upon Him, as their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30) To these I can address myself with more freedom.

You know the difficulties of my situation, and will assist me with your *prayers*. I trust likewise you will assist me with your *conduct*, and that your lives and godly speech will contribute to stop the mouths of gainsayers, and constrain them to acknowledge, that the doctrines of grace, which I preach, when rightly understood and

cordially embraced—are productive of peace, contentment, integrity, benevolence, and humility.

Many eyes are upon you, watching for your halting, and seeking occasion by your miscarriages, if they can observe any—to speak evil of the way of truth. (2 Peter 2:2) May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ enable you to disappoint them and make them ashamed!

We must expect some opposition, along with many temptations and trials. But we are engaged in a good cause, and we have a mighty Savior, a compassionate Friend, a prevailing Advocate! He knows your path; He sees your conflicts—and He has engaged to support, to guide, and to guard you, and at length to make you more than conquerors, (Romans 8:37) and to bestow upon you a crown of everlasting life!

I am your affectionate servant,
John Newton

Blemishes in Christian character

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." Philippians 4:8

Dear Sir,

The precept which I have chosen for my motto is applicable to many particulars which are but seldom and occasionally mentioned from

the pulpit. There are improprieties of conduct, which, though usually considered as *foibles* which hardly deserve a severe censure, are properly sinful; for though some of them may not seem to violate any express command of Scripture, yet they are contrary to that holiness and circumspection which become our profession. A Christian, by the tenor of his high calling, is bound to avoid even the appearance of evil; and his deportment should not only be upright as to his leading principles, but amiable and engaging, and as free as possible from every inconsistency and blemish. The characters of some valuable people are clouded, and the influence they might otherwise have greatly counteracted, by comparatively *small faults*; yet faults they certainly are; and it would be well if they could be made so sensible of them, and of their ill effects, as that they might earnestly watch, and strive, and pray against them.

I know not how to explain myself better than by attempting the outlines of a few **portraits**, to each of which I apprehend some strong resemblances may be found in real life. I do not wish to set my readers to work to find out such resemblance's among their neighbors; but would advise them to examine carefully, whether they cannot, in one or other of them, discover some traces of their own features: and though I speak of men only, counterparts to the several characters may doubtless be found here and there among the women; for the imperfections and evils of a fallen nature are equally entailed upon both sexes.

'**Austerus**' is a solid and exemplary Christian. He has a deep, extensive, and experimental knowledge of Divine things. Inflexibly and invariably true to his principles, he stems with a noble singularity the torrent of the world, and can neither be bribed nor intimidated from the path of duty. He is a rough diamond of great intrinsic value, and would sparkle with a distinguished luster if he

were more polished. But, though the word of God is his daily study, and he prizes the precepts, as well as the promises, more than thousands of gold and silver, there is one precept he seems to have overlooked—"be compassionate and humble." 1 Peter 3:8.

Instead of that gentleness and humility which will always be expected from a professed follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, there is a harshness in his manner, which makes him more admired than beloved; and those who truly love him, often feel more constraint than pleasure when in his company. His intimate friends are satisfied that he is no stranger to true humility of heart; but these are few: by others he is thought proud, dogmatic, and self important; nor can this prejudice against him be easily removed, until he can lay aside that cynical air which he has unhappily contracted.

'Humanus' is generous and benevolent. His feelings are lively, and his expressions of them strong. No one is more distant from sordid views, or less influenced by a selfish spirit. His heart burns with love to Jesus, and he is ready to receive with open arms all who love his Savior. Yet, with an upright and friendly spirit, which entitles him to the love and esteem of all who know him, he has not everything we would wish in a friend. In some respects, though not in the most criminal sense, **he bridles not his tongue**. Should you entrust him with a secret—you thereby put it in the possession of the public. Not that he would willfully betray you; but it is his infirmity: he knows not how to keep a secret; it escapes from him before he is aware. So likewise as to matters of fact: in things which are of great importance, and where he is sufficiently informed, no man has a stricter regard to truth; but in the smaller concerns of common life, whether it be from credulity, or from a strange and blamable inadvertence, he frequently grieves and surprises those who know his real character, by saying what is not strictly true. Thus they to whom

he opens his very heart dare not make him returns of equal confidence; and those who in some cases would venture their lives upon his word, in others are afraid of telling a story after him. How lamentable are such blemishes in such a person!

'Prudens' though not of a generous natural temper, is a partaker of that grace which opens the heart, and inspires a disposition to love and to good works. He does not bestow his alms to be seen by men; but those who have the best opportunities of knowing what he does for the relief of others, and of comparing it with his ability, can acquit him in good measure of the charge which another part of his conduct exposes him to. For Prudens is a great economist; and though he would not willingly wrong or injure any person, yet the base means to which he will submit, either to save or gain a penny in what he accounts an honest way, are a great discredit to his profession. He is punctual in fulfilling his engagements; but exceedingly hard, strict, and suspicious in making his bargains. And in his dress, and every article of his personal concerns, he is content to be so much below the station in which the providence of God has placed him, that to those who are not acquainted with his private benefactions to the poor, he appears under the hateful character of a miser, and to be **governed by that love of money** which the Scripture declares to be the root of all evil, and inconsistent with the true love of God and of the saints.

'Volatilis' is sufficiently exact in performing his promises—in such instances as he thinks of real importance. If he bids a person depend upon his assistance, he will not disappoint his expectations. Perhaps he is equally sincere in all his promises at the time of making them; but, for lack of method in the management of his affairs, he is always in a hurry, always too late, and has always some engagement upon his hands with which it is impossible he can comply: yet he goes on

in this way, exposing himself and others to continual disappointments. He accepts, without a thought, proposals which are incompatible with each other, and will perhaps undertake to be at two or three different and distant places at the same hour. This has been so long his practice, that nobody now expects him until they see him. In other respects he is a good sort of man; but this **lack of punctuality**, which runs through his whole deportment, puts everything out of course in which he is concerned, abroad and at home. Volatilis excuses himself as well as he can, and chiefly by alleging, that the things in which he fails are of no great consequence. But he would do well to remember, that **truth** is a sacred thing, and ought not to be violated in the smallest matters, without an unforeseen and unavoidable prevention. Such a trifling turn of spirit lessens the weight of a person's character, though he makes no pretensions to piety, and is a still greater blemish in a professor.

'**Cessator**' is not chargeable with being buried in the cares and business of the present life to the neglect of the one thing needful; but he **greatly neglects the duties of his station**. Had he been sent into the world only to read, pray, hear sermons, and join in pious conversation—he might pass for an eminent Christian. But though it is to be hoped that his abounding in these exercises springs from a heart-attachment to Divine things, his conduct evidences that his judgment is weak, and his views of his Christian calling are very narrow and defective. He does not consider, that waiting upon God in the public and private ordinances is designed, not to excuse us from the discharge of the duties of civil life, but to instruct, strengthen, and qualify us for their performance. His affairs are in disorder, and his family and friends are likely to suffer by his indolence. He thanks God that he is not worldly-minded; but he is an idle and unfaithful member of society, and causes the way of truth to

be evil spoken of. Of such the Apostle has determined, that "if any man will not work, neither should he eat."

'*Curiosus*' is upright and unblamably in his general deportment, and no stranger to the experiences of a true Christian. His conversation upon these subjects is often satisfactory and edifying. He would be a much more agreeable companion, were it not for a **bothersome desire of knowing everybody's business**, and the grounds of every hint that is occasionally dropped in discourse where he is present. This puts him upon asking a multiplicity of needless and improper questions; and obliges those who know him, to be continually upon their guard, and to treat him with reserve. He intrudes even with strangers, and is unwilling to part with them until he is punctually informed of all their connections, employment's and designs. For this idle curiosity he is marked and avoided **as a busy-body**; and those who have the best opinion of him, cannot but wonder that a man, who appears to have so many better things to employ his thoughts, should find time to amuse himself with what does not at all concern him. Were it not for the rules of civility, he would be insulted every day; and if he would attend to the cold and evasive answers he receives to his inquiries, or even to the looks with which they are accompanied, he might learn, that, though he means no harm, he appears to a great disadvantage and that **his prying disposition** is very unpleasant.

'*Querulus*' wastes much of his precious time in declaiming against the management of public affairs; though he has neither access to the springs which move the wheels of government, nor influence either to accelerate or retard their motions. Our national concerns are no more affected by the remonstrance's of Querulus, than the heavenly bodies are by the disputes of astronomers. While the newspapers are the chief sources of his news and his situation precludes him from

being a competent judge either of matters of fact or matters of right, why should Querulus trouble himself with **politics**? This would be a weakness, if we consider him only as a member of society; but if we consider him as a Christian, it is worse than weakness; it is a sinful conformity to the men of the world, who look no farther than to second causes, and forget that the Lord reigns.

If a Christian be placed in a public sphere of action, he should undoubtedly be faithful to his calling, and endeavor by all lawful methods to transmit our privileges to posterity: but it would be better for Querulus to let the dead bury the dead. There are people enough to make a noise about political matters, who know not how to employ their **time** to better purpose. Our Lord's kingdom is not of this world; and most of his people may do their country much more essential service by pleading for it in prayer, than by finding fault with things which they have no power to alter. If Querulus had opportunity of spending a few months under some of the governments upon the Continent (I may indeed say under any of them), he would probably bring home with him a more grateful sense of the Lord's goodness to him, in appointing his lot in Britain. As it is, his zeal is not only unprofitable to others, but hurtful to himself. It embitters his spirit, it diverts his thoughts from things of greater importance, and prevents him from feeling the value of those blessings, civil and religious, which he actually possesses. And could he (as he wishes) prevail on many to act in the same spirit, the governing powers might be irritated to take every opportunity of abridging that religious liberty which we are favored with above all the notions upon earth. Let me remind Querulus, that the hour is approaching, when many things, which at present too much engross his thoughts and inflame his passions, will appear as foreign to him, as what is now transacting among the Tartars or Chinese.

Other improprieties of conduct, which lessen the influence and spot the profession of some who wish well to the cause of Christ, might be enumerated, but these may suffice for a specimen.

God Rules All!

February, 1774

Dear sir,

"I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. Psalm 135:5-6. **God rules all!** And though He is concealed by a veil of second causes from common eyes, so that they can perceive only the means, instruments, and contingencies by which he works, and therefore think He does nothing; yet, in reality, He does all, according to His own counsel and pleasure, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

Who can enumerate all the beings and events, which are incessantly before His eye, adjusted by His wisdom, dependent on His will, and regulated by His power! If we consider the heavens, the work of His fingers, the moon and the stars which He has ordained; if we call in the assistance of astronomers to help us in forming a conception of the number, distances, magnitudes, and motions of the heavenly bodies—the more we search, the more we shall be confirmed, that these are but a small portion of His ways! But He calls them all by their names, upholds them by His power, and without His continual energy upholding them—they would rush into confusion, or sink into nothing!

If we speak of intelligences, He is the life, the joy, the sun of all that are capable of happiness. Whatever may be signified by the thrones, principalities, and powers in the world of light, they are all dependent upon his power, and obedient to his command. It is equally true of angels as of men, that without him they can do nothing. The powers of darkness are likewise under his subjection and control. Though but little is said of them in Scripture, we read enough to assure us that their number must be immensely great, and that their strength, subtlety, and malice are such as we may tremble to think of them as our enemies, and probably should—but for our strange *insensibility* to whatever does not fall under the cognizance of our outward senses. But he holds them all in a chain, so that they can do or attempt nothing but by his permission; and whatever he permits them to do has its appointed subservience in accomplishing his designs.

To come nearer home, and to speak of what seems more suited to our scanty apprehensions—still we may be lost in wonder. Before this blessed and only Potentate, all the nations of the earth are but as the dust upon the balance, and the small drop of a bucket, and might be thought (if compared with the immensity of his works) scarcely worthy of his notice! Yet here he presides, pervades, provides, protects, and rules. In him his creatures live, move, and have their being. From him is their food and preservation. The eyes of all are upon him—what he gives they gather, and can gather no more! And at his word they sink into the dust! There is not a *worm* which crawls upon the ground, or a *flower* which grows in the pathless wilderness, or a shell upon the sea-shore—but bears the impress of his wisdom, power, and goodness.

With respect to men, he reigns with uncontrolled dominion over every kingdom, family, and individual. Here we may be astonished at

his wisdom in employing free agents, the greater part of whom are his enemies, to accomplish his purposes! But, however reluctant, they all serve him. His patience likewise is wonderful. Multitudes, yes, nearly our whole species, spend the life and strength which he affords them, and abuse all the bounties he heaps upon them—in the ways of sin! His commands are disregarded, his name blasphemed, his mercy disdained, his power defied—yet still he spares! It is an eminent part of his government, to restrain the depravity of human nature, and in various ways to check its effects, which, if left to itself, without his providential control, would presently make earth the very image of hell—for the vilest men are not allowed to perpetrate a thousandth part of the evil which their hearts would prompt them to. The earth, though lying in the wicked one, is filled with the goodness of the Lord. He preserves man and beast, sustains the young lion in the forest, feeds the birds of the air, which have neither storehouse or barn, and adorns the insects and the flowers of the field with a beauty and elegance beyond all that can be found in the courts of kings!

Still more wonderful, is Christ's administration in His kingdom of grace! He is present with all His creatures—but in a special manner with His own people. Each of these are monuments of a more illustrious display of power, than that which spread abroad the heavens like a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth. For He finds them all in a state of rebellion and enmity—and makes them His willing people! From the moment that He reveals His love to them—He espouses their cause, and takes all their concerns into His own hands. He is near and attentive to every one of them—as if there was only that one!

This high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, before whom the angels veil their faces—condescends to hold communion with those

whom men despise. He passes by the kings and the princes, to manifest Himself to an humble soul in a mud-walled cottage! He comforts them when in trouble, strengthens them when weak, makes their beds in sickness, revives them when fainting, upholds them when falling, and so seasonably and effectually manages for them, that, though they are persecuted and tempted, though their enemies are many and mighty—nothing is able to separate them from His love!

And all this he does alone. All the abilities, powers, and instincts, which are found among creatures, are emanations from his fullness. All changes, successes, disappointments—all that is memorable in the annals of history, all the rising and falls of empires, all the turns in human life—take place according to his plan. In vain men contrive and combine to accomplish their own counsels, unless they are parts of his counsel likewise! The efforts of their utmost strength and wisdom are crossed and reversed, by the feeblest and most unthought-of circumstances. But when he has a work to accomplish, and his time has come, however inadequate and weak the means he employs may seem to a carnal eye—the success is infallibly secured. For all things serve him, and are in his hands as clay in the hands of the potter. Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are your ways, O King of saints!

This is the God whom we adore! This is he who invites us to lean upon his almighty arm, and promises to guide us with his unerring eye! He says to all of his children, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine! When you go through deep waters and great trouble—I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty—you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression—you will not be burned up; the

flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3.

Therefore, while in the path of duty, and following his call, we may cheerfully pass on, regardless of apparent difficulties; for the Lord, whose we are, and who has taught us make his glory our highest end, will go before us, and at his word crooked things become straight, light shines out of darkness, and mountains sink into plains! Faith may and must be exercised; experience must and will confirm what his word declares, that the heart is deceitful, and that man in his best estate is vanity! But his promises to those who fear him, shall be confirmed likewise, and they shall find him, in all situations, to be our sun, shield, and exceeding great reward.

I have lost another of my people; a *mother in our Israel*; a person of much experience, eminent grace, wisdom, and usefulness. She walked with God forty years. She was one of the Lord's poor; but her poverty was decent, sanctified, and honorable. She lived respected, and her death is considered as a public loss. It is a great loss to me: I shall miss her advice and example, by which I have been often edified and animated. But Jesus still lives. Almost her last words were, "The Lord is my portion, says my soul."

Thoughts on the Government of the Tongue

by John Newton

There is, perhaps, no one test or proof of the reality of a work of grace upon the heart, more simple, clear, and infallible—than the general tenor of our *language* and *conversation*; for our Lord's aphorism is of certain and universal application, that, "out of the

abundance of the *heart*—the mouth speaks." To the same purpose, the apostle James proposes to all who make profession of the gospel, a searching criterion of their sincerity, when he says, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight bridle on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless." This passage should not be thought a hard saying, for it stands in the Bible; but, because it stands in the Bible, and forms a part of the *rule* by which the characters and states of all men will be finally determined, there is reason to fear that it will be found a hard saying at last, by too many who name the name of Christ. A few thoughts upon this important subject, "the government of the tongue" can never be unseasonable.

It is not the restraint of the heart, which the apostle requires. He knew that, though it is our duty to watch against the first rising motions of evil within, and to be humbled for them—that it is not in our power wholly to prevent them. But he supposes that the grace of God in a true believer will check the evils of the heart, and prevent them from breaking out by the tongue.

Nor is the restraint of the tongue to be taken so strictly, as if a true believer was never liable to speak unadvisedly. *Job* and *Jeremiah* cursed the day of their birth; and *Peter* not only denied his Lord—but denied him with oaths and execrations. I allow that it is possible for the best of men, in an unguarded hour, and through the pressure of some sudden and violent temptation or provocation, may occasionally act or speak unsuitably to their habitual gracious character. But I think the apostle must mean thus much at least, that, when saving grace is in the heart—it will so regulate and control the tongue, that it shall not customarily sin; and that, without some evidence of such a regulation, we are not bound to acknowledge any man to be a Christian, however splendid his profession may be in

other respects. Nay, I think we may further say of this test, what the magicians of Egypt acknowledged upon another occasion, "This is the finger of God!" This is, perhaps, the only *outward* mark of a believer, which the hypocrite cannot imitate. In many things he may seem to be religious; in some, perhaps, he may appear to go beyond the real Christian; but, because his heart is unchanged—he cannot bridle his tongue.

The man who seems, and who desires to be thought religious, may have many qualifications to support his claim, which may be valuable and commendable in themselves, and yet are of no avail to the possessor, if he bridles not his tongue. He may have much *religious knowledge*; I mean, of such knowledge as may be acquired in the use of ordinary means. He may have a *warm zeal*, and may contend earnestly (in his way) for the faith once delivered to the saints. He may be able to *talk* well on spiritual subjects, to *pray* with freedom and fervency. Yes, he may even be a preacher, and conduct himself to the satisfaction of sincere Christians. Or he may be a fair trader, a good neighbor, a kind master, an affectionate husband or parent, be free from gross vices, and attend constantly upon the ordinances. Will not such a man seem to himself, and probably be esteemed by others—to be religious? Yet if, with all these good properties, he does not bridle his tongue—he may be said to lack the one thing needful. He deceives his own heart! His religion is vain!

But what are we to understand by **bridling the tongue**? The expression, I think, will be sufficiently explained by considering how the grace of God will necessarily influence and govern the tongues of those who partake of it, in what they say when they are led to speak of *God*, of *themselves*, and of or to their *fellow-creatures*.

Having seen a glimpse of the holiness and majesty, the glory and the grace, of the great **God** with whom they have to do—their hearts are impressed with reverence, and therefore there is a sobriety and decorum in their language. They cannot speak lightly of God, or of his ways. One would suppose that no person, who even but seems to be religious, can directly and expressly profane his glorious name. But there is a careless and flippant manner of speaking of the great God, which is very disgusting and very suspicious. Likewise, the hearts of believers teach their mouths to speak honorably of God under all their afflictions and crosses, acknowledging the wisdom and the mercy of his dispensations; and, if an impatient word escapes them, it grieves and humbles them, as quite unfitting their situation as His creatures, and especially as sinful creatures, who have always reason to acknowledge, that it is of the Lord's mercy, that they are not wholly consumed.

When they speak of **themselves**, their tongues are bridled, and restrained from *boasting*. They speak as befits poor, unworthy creatures—because they feel themselves to be such. In what they say, either of their comforts or of their sorrows, sincerity dictates a simplicity which cannot be easily counterfeited. While they, whose tongues are not thus bridled, often betray themselves by a lack of sincerity, even when they are lamenting their sinfulness, and the vileness of their hearts.

In what they say of or to **others**, the tongues of believers are bridled by a heart felt regard to truth, love and purity.

Where grace is in the heart, the tongue will be bridled by the law of TRUTH. It is grievous to see how nearly and readily some professors of religion will venture upon the *borders of a lie*; either to defend their own conduct, to avoid some inconvenience, to procure a

supposed advantage, or sometimes merely to embellish a story. Admitting the possibility of a sincere person being surprised into the declaration of a lie—yet, where instances of this kind are frequent, I hardly know a *fouler blot* in profession, or which can give a more just warrant to fear that such professors know nothing aright either of God or themselves. The Lord is a God of truth; and he teaches his servants to hate and abhor lying, and to speak the truth from their hearts. I may add likewise, with regard to *promises*—that, though the law of the land requires, on many occasions, oaths and bonds to secure their performance, that person, whose word may *not* be safely depended upon without either bond or oath, scarcely deserves the name of a Christian!

Where grace is in the heart, the tongue will be likewise bridled by the law of LOVE. If we love our neighbor, can we lightly speak evil of him, magnify his failings, or use provoking or insulting language? Love thinks no evil—but bears, hopes and endures. Love acts by the golden rule, to "Do unto others—what you would like them to do unto you." Those who are under the influence of Christian love, will be gentle and compassionate, disposed to make the most favorable allowances, and of course their tongues will be restrained from the language of malevolence, harsh censure, and slander—which are as familiar to us as our mother tongue, until we are made partakers of the grace of God.

The tongue is also bridled by a regard to PURITY, agreeable to the precepts, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving." Ephesians 4:29, 5:4. Grace has taught believers to *hate* these things; how then can their tongues *speak* of them?

There are false professors, indeed, who can suit their language to their company. When with the people of God—they call talk very seriously. But at other times, they are well pleased to join in vain, frothy, and evil conversation. But this double-mindedness is of itself sufficient to discredit all their pretenses to a pious character.

Upon the whole, though perfection is not to be expected, though true believers may, on some occasions, speak rashly, and have great cause for humiliation, watchfulness, and prayer, with respect to the government of their tongues; yet I think the Scripture, and particularly the apostle James, in the passage I have mentioned, authorizes this conclusion. That, if the tongue is frequently without a bridle; if it may be observed, that a person often speaks *lightly* of God and of divine things, *proudly* of himself, *harshly* of his fellow-creatures; if it can be truly affirmed, that he is a liar, a talebearer, a railer, a flatterer, or a jester—then, whatever other good qualities he may seem to possess—his speech betrays him! He deceives himself, his religion is vain. Let us think of these things, and entreat the Lord to cast the salt of his grace into the fountain of our hearts, that the streams of our conversation may be wholesome.

Assurance of Salvation

July 11, 1795

We may easily conceive of a tree without fruit—but the idea of fruit is naturally connected with that of some tree which produces it. In this sense, *assurance* is the essence of *faith*; that is—it springs from true faith, and can grow upon no other root. Faith likewise is the measure of assurance. While faith is weak, (our Lord compares it, in its first principle, to a grain of mustard seed,) assurance cannot be strong.

Jesus Christ the Lord is a complete all-sufficient Savior. His invitation to the weary and heavy-laden is general, without exception, condition, or limitation. He has said, him who comes unto me, I will never cast out. God not only *permits*—but *commands* us to believe in the Son of his love. The apostle affirms that he is able to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him. When Moses raised the brazen serpent in the wilderness, the direction to the wounded Israelites was very short and simple—it was only, *Look, and live!* Thus the gospel addresses the sinner, *Only believe, and you shall be saved.*

Why then does not every sinner who is awakened to a sense of his guilt, danger, and helplessness; and whose desires are drawn towards the Savior—believe with full confidence, even upon his first application for mercy? Is not the *remedy* fully adequate to the *malady*? Is not the blood of Jesus able to cleanse from *all* sin? Is not the Word of the God of truth worthy of entire credit? Yet with such a *Savior* exhibited before the eyes of his mind, and with such *promises* sounding in his ears—he continues to hesitate and fluctuate between *hope* and *fear*. Could he rely as firmly on the Word of *God*, as he can on the word of a *man*, whom, he thinks, means what he says, and is

able to make good his promises—he would immediately be filled with joy and peace in believing. But experience and observation may convince us, that, however rational and easy this assurance may seem in *theory*, it is ordinarily unattainable in *practice*—without passing through a train of previous exercises and conflicts.

It is true, young converts are often favored with comfortable impressions, which lead them to hope that their doubts and difficulties are already *ended*—when perhaps they are but just *entering* upon their warfare. They are brought, as it were, into a new world; a strong and lively sense of divine things engrosses their attention; the world and its fascinations sink into nothing in their esteem; the evil propensities which discourage them are overpowered for a season, and they hope they are quite subdued, and will trouble them no more. Their love, gratitude, praise, and admiration, are in vigorous exercise.

An aged, experienced Christian may recollect, with a *pleasing regret*, many sweet sensations of this kind, in the early stages of his profession, which he cannot recall. But he now knows that the strong confidence he felt in *these golden* hours was not the *assurance* of faith—it was temporary and transient; it was founded upon what we call a *good frame*. Though his *comforts* were strong, his *faith* was weak—for, when the good frame subsided, his fears returned, his hope declined, and he was at his wits' end. Then, perhaps, he wondered at his own presumption, for daring to hope that such a creature as himself could have any right to the privileges of a believer. And if, in the warmth of his heart, he had spoken to others of what God had done for his soul, he afterwards charged himself with being a hypocrite, and a false witness both to God and man. Thus, when the Israelites saw the Egyptians, (who had pursued and terrified them,) cast up dead upon the shore of the Red Sea, they

praised the Lord, and believed. They were little aware of the *wilderness* they had to pass through, and the *trials* they were to meet with—before they could enter the promised land!

But *strong faith*, and the effect of it, an abiding persuasion of our acceptance in the Beloved, and of our final perseverance in grace—are not necessarily connected with *sensible comfort*. A strong faith can *trust God in the dark*, and say with Job, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him." Yet it is not to be *maintained* without a diligent use of the instituted means of grace, and a conscientious attention to the precepts of the gospel. For *mere notions* of truth, destitute of *power*—will not keep the heart in peace. But this power depends upon the influence of the Holy Spirit; and if he is grieved by the willful *commission of sin*, or the willful *neglect of the precepts*—he hides his face, suspends his influence, and then confidence must proportionable decline, until he is pleased to return and revive it.

There are likewise bodily disorders, which, by depressing the physical spirits, darken and discolor the medium of our perceptions. If the enemy is permitted to take advantage of these seasons, he can pour in a flood of temptations, sufficient to fill the most assured believer with terror and dismay. But, ordinarily, those who endeavor to walk closely and conscientiously with God, attain, in due time, an assurance of hope to the end, which is not easily nor often shaken, though it is not absolutely perfect, nor can be, while so much sin and imperfection remain in us.

If it be inquired—**WHY we cannot attain to this state of composure at first**, since the object of faith and the promises of God are always the same? Several reasons may be assigned.

Unbelief is the primary cause of all our inquietude, from the moment that our hearts are drawn to seek salvation by Jesus. This

inability to take God at his Word, should not be merely lamented as an *infirmity*—but watched, and prayed, and fought against as a *great sin*. A great sin indeed it is; the very root of our apostasy, from which every other sin proceeds. Unbelief often deceives us under the *guise of humility*, as though it would be *presumption*, in such sinners as we are, to believe the declarations of the God of truth. Many serious people, who are burdened with a sense of other sins, leave this radical evil, unbelief, out of their list of sin. They rather indulge it, and think they ought not to believe, until they can find a warrant from marks and evidences *within* themselves. But this is an affront to the wisdom and goodness of God, who points out to us the Son of his love—as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, without any regard to what we *have been*, or to what we *are*, excepting that broken and contrite spirit—which only himself can create in us. And this broken spirit, though unbelief perverts it to our discouragement, is the very temper in which the Lord delights, and a surer evidence of true grace, than those which we are apt to contrive for ourselves. It is written, He who *believes* not the record which God has given of his Son, makes him a liar. Why do we not startle with horror—at the workings of unbelief, as we should do at a suggestion to commit murder, or the grossest outward enormity?

Again, our **natural pride** is a great hindrance to true faith. If we acknowledge ourselves to be sinners, and are sensible of our need of mercy—we are not easily brought to see that we are so totally depraved, so exceedingly vile, so utterly destitute of all good, as the Word of God describes us to be. A secret dependence upon our prayers, tears, resolutions, repentance and endeavors, prevents us from looking solely and simply to the Savior, so as to ground our whole hope for acceptance upon his obedience unto death, and his whole mediation.

A true believer will doubtless repent and pray, and forsake his former evil ways—but he is not accepted upon the account of what *he* does or feels—but because Jesus lived and died, and rose and reigns on the behalf of sinners, and because he is enabled by grace to trust in him for salvation.

Further, pride leads us into that spirit of *vain reasoning*, which is contrary to the simplicity of living by faith. Until this is renounced, until we become in some measure like little children, and receive the doctrines of Scripture implicitly, because they are from God, requiring no further proof of any point than a *Thus says the Lord*—we cannot be established in our hope. Naaman was very desirous to be healed of his leprosy; but, if the Lord had not mercifully overruled his prejudices, he would have returned a leper—just as he came. Before he went to Elisha, he had considered in his own mind, how the prophet ought to treat him; and not having the immediate attention paid to him that he expected, he was upon the point of going away; for his reason told him, that, if washing could effect his cure, the waters of Syria were as good as those of Jordan. "It seems," to use the words of a late ingenious writer, "that the gospel is too *good* to be believed, and too *plain* to be understood, until our *pride* is abased."

It is difficult to determine, by the eye, the precise moment of day-break, but the light advances from early dawn, and the sun arises at the appointed hour. Such is the progress of divine light in the mind—the first streaks of the dawn are seldom perceived; but, by degrees, objects, until then unthought of, are revealed. The evil of sin, the danger of the soul, the reality and importance of eternal things—are apprehended, and a hope of mercy through a Savior is discovered, which prevents the sinner from sinking into absolute despair. But for a time—all is indistinct and confused.

In this state of mind, many things are anxiously sought for as prerequisites to believing—but they are sought in vain, for it is only by believing that they can be obtained. But the *light increases*, the sun arises, the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ shines in upon the soul. As the sun can only be seen by its own light, and diffuses that light by which other objects are clearly perceived; so Christ crucified is the sun in the system of revealed truth; and the right knowledge of the *doctrine of his cross* satisfies the inquiring mind, proves itself to be the one thing needful, and the only thing necessary to silence the objections of unbelief and pride, and to afford a sure ground for solid and abiding hope.

Once more—we cannot be safely trusted with assurance—until we have that knowledge of the evil and deceitfulness of our hearts, which can be acquired only by painful, repeated experience. The young convert, in his brighter hours, when his heart is full of joys, and he thinks his mountain stands too strong to be removed, may be compared to a ship with much sail spread, and but little ballast. She goes on well while the weather is fair—but is not prepared for a storm. When Peter said, "You have the words of eternal life—we believe and are sure that you are the Christ," and when he protested, "Though all men should forsake you—yet will not I," he undoubtedly spoke honestly; but the event showed that *he did not know himself!* His resolution was soon and sorely shaken in the hall of the high-priest, so that he denied his Lord with oaths and imprecations. He was left to fall—that he might learn he did not stand by his own strength.

The parable of the *prodigal* may be accommodated for an illustration of this point. The Scripture says, "Then shall you know—if you follow on to know the Lord." But we often want to know at first, and at once; and suppose— If I was but sure that I am right, and accepted in

the Beloved, I could go on with more spirit and success. Many rejoice greatly when they seem to obtain this desire—but their joy is short-lived. They soon resemble the prodigal; they become vain, rash, and careless; they forsake their Father's house; their attention to the means of grace is slackened; they venture upon smaller deviations from the prescribed rule, which, in time, lead them to greater. Thus their stock of *grace* and *comfort* is quickly exhausted. They begin to be in need; and, after having been feasted with the *bread of life*, are reduced to feed upon such *husks* as the world can afford them. Happy, if at length they are brought to their right minds!

But, oh, with what pungent shame and humiliation do they come back to their Father! He, indeed, is always ready to receive and forgive backsliders; but surely they cannot easily forgive themselves for their ingratitude and folly! When he has healed their broken bones, and restored peace to their souls, it may be expected that they will walk softly and humbly to the end of their days, and not open their mouths any more, either to boast, or to censure, or to complain!

For, a man who possesses a Scriptural and well-grounded assurance in himself—will *evidence* it to others by *suitable fruits*. He will be meek, sincere and gentle in his conduct before men—because he is humbled and abased before God. Because he lives upon much God's forgiveness to himself—he will be ready to forgive others. The prospect of that blessed hope assuredly laid up for him in heaven—will make him patient under all his appointed trials in the present life, wean him from an attachment to the world, and preserve him from being much affected either by the smiles or the frowns of mortals. To hear people talk much of their 'assurance', and that they are freed from all doubts and fears—while they habitually indulge proud, angry, resentful, discontented tempers, or while they are eagerly grasping after the world, like those who seek their whole

portion in it—is painful and disgusting to a serious Christian! Let us pity them, and pray for them; for we have great reason to fear that they do not understand what they say, nor what they affirm!

Man in His Fallen Estate

"**What is man**, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous?" Job 15:14

Dear Sir,

We hear much in the present day of *the dignity of human nature*. And it is allowed that man was an excellent creature as he came out of the hands of God; but if we consider this question with a view to fallen man, as depraved by sin, how can we but join with the Psalmist in wonder that the great God should make any account of him?

Fallen as man is from his original state of happiness and holiness, his natural faculties and abilities afford sufficient evidence that the hand which made him is Divine. He is capable of great things. His understanding, will, affections, imagination, and memory—are noble and amazing powers. But view him in a *moral* light, as an intelligent being, incessantly dependent upon God, accountable to him, and appointed by him to a state of existence in an unchangeable world: considered in this relation—man is a monster, a vile, base, stupid, obstinate, and mischievous creature; no words can fully describe him. Man, with all his boasted understanding and attainments, is a fool: so long as he is destitute of the saving grace of God, his conduct, as to his most important concerns, is more absurd and inconsistent than that of the most contemptible idiot; with respect to his affections and pursuits, he is degraded far below the beasts; and for

the malignity and wickedness of his will, can be compared to nothing so properly as to the devil.

The question here is not concerning this or that man, a Nero or a Heliogabalus, but concerning human nature, the whole race of mankind, the few excepted who are born of God. There is indeed a difference among men, but it is owing to the restraints of Divine Providence, without which earth would be the very image of hell. A wolf or a lion, while chained, cannot do so much mischief as if they were loose, but the nature is the same in the whole species. Education and personal interest, fear and shame, human laws, and the secret power of God over the mind, combine to form many characters that are extremely decent and respectable; and even the most abandoned are under a restraint which prevents them from manifesting a thousandth part of the wickedness which is in their hearts. But the heart itself is universally deceitful, and desperately wicked.

Man is a **FOOL**. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Romans 1:22. He can indeed measure the earth, and almost count the stars; he abounds in arts and inventions, in science and policy—and shall he then be called a fool? The ancient Heathens, the inhabitants of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were eminent for this kind of wisdom. They are to this day studied as models by those who aim to excel in history, poetry, painting, architecture, and other exertions of human genius, which are suited to polish the manners without improving the heart. But their most admired philosophers, legislators, logicians, orators, and artists, were as destitute as infants or idiots of that knowledge which alone deserves the name of true wisdom. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Ignorant and regardless of God, yet conscious of their weakness, and of their dependence upon a Power above their own, and stimulated

by an inward principle of fear, of which they knew neither the origin nor right application, they worshiped the creature instead of the Creator, yes, placed their trust in stocks and stones, in the works of men's hands, in non-entities and chimeras. An acquaintance with their mythology, or system of religious fables, passes with us for a considerable branch of learning, because it is drawn from ancient books written in languages not known to the vulgar; but in point of certainty or truth, we might receive as much satisfaction from a collection of dreams, or from the ravings of lunatics.

If, therefore, we admit these admired sages as a tolerable specimen of mankind, must we not confess that man, in his best estate, while uninstructed by the Spirit of God, is a fool? But are we wiser than they? Not in the least, until the grace of God makes us so. Our superior advantages only show our folly in a more striking light. Why do we account any people foolish? A fool has no sound judgment; he is governed wholly by appearances, and would prefer a fine coat to the deed to a large estate. He pays no regard to consequences: fools have sometimes hurt or killed their best friends, and thought they did no harm. A fool cannot reason, therefore arguments are lost upon him. At one time, if tied with a straw, he dares not stir; at another time, perhaps, he can hardly be persuaded to move, though the house were on fire. Are these the characteristics of a fool? Then there is no fool like the sinner, who prefers the toys of earth to the happiness of heaven; who is held in bondage by the foolish customs of the world; and is more afraid of the breath of man, than of the wrath of God.

Again: Man in his natural state is a **BEAST**, yes, below the beasts which perish. In two things he strongly resembles them; in looking no higher than to sensual gratifications, and in that selfishness of spirit which prompts him to propose himself and his own interest as

his proper and highest end. But in many respects he sinks sadly beneath them. Unnatural lusts, and the lack of natural affection towards their offspring, are abominations not to be found among the brute creation. What shall we say of mothers destroying their children with their own hands, or of the horrid act of self-murder! Men are worse than beasts likewise in their obstinacy; they will not be warned. If a beast escapes from a trap, he will be cautious how he goes near it again, and in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird. But man, though he be often reprov'd, hardens his neck; he rushes upon his ruin with his eyes open, and can defy God to his face, and dare damnation.

Once more: Let us observe how man resembles the **DEVIL**. There are spiritual sins, and from these in their height the Scripture teaches us to judge of Satan's character. Every feature in this description is strong in man; so that what our Lord said to the Jews is of general application, "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do." Man resembles Satan in **pride**: this stupid, wicked creature values himself upon his wisdom, power, and virtue, and will talk of being saved by his good works; though if he can, Satan himself need not despair. He resembles him in **malice**; and this diabolical disposition often proceeds to murder, and would daily, if the Lord did not restrain it. He derives from Satan the hateful spirit of **envy**: he is often tormented beyond expression, by beholding the prosperity of his neighbors; and proportionably pleased with their calamities, though he gains no other advantage from them than the gratification of this rancorous principle.

He bears the image likewise of Satan in his **cruelty**. This evil is bound up in the heart even of a child. A disposition to take pleasure in giving pain to others, appears very early. Children, if left to themselves, soon feel a gratification in torturing insects and animals.

What misery does the wanton cruelty of men inflict upon cocks, dogs, bulls, bears, and other creatures, which they seem to think were formed for no other end than to feast their savage spirits with their torments! If we form our judgment of men, when they seem most pleased, and have neither anger nor resentment to plead in their excuse, it is too evident, even from the nature of their amusements, whose they are and whom they serve. And they are the worst of enemies to each other. Think of the horrors of war, the rage of duelists, of the murders and assassinations with which the world is filled, and then say, "Lord, what is man!"

Further, if **deceit** and **treachery** belong to Satan's character, then surely man resembles him. Is not the universal observation, and complaint of all ages, an affecting comment upon the Prophet's words, "Trust not in a friend, put no confidence in a guide, keep the doors of your mouth from her that lies in your bosom, for they hunt every man his brother with a net?" How many have at this moment cause to say, with David, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords!"

Again: Like Satan, men are eager in **TEMPTING** others to sin; not content to damn themselves, they employ all their arts and influence to draw as many as they can with them into the same destruction.

Lastly: In direct **opposition to God** and goodness, in contemptuous enmity to the Gospel of his grace, and a bitter persecuting spirit against those who profess it, Satan himself can hardly exceed them. Herein, indeed, they are his agents and willing servants; and because the blessed God is himself out of their reach, they labor to show their despite to him in the people of his people.

I have drawn but a sketch, a few outlines, of the picture of fallen man. To give an exact copy of him, to charge every feature with its full aggravation of horror, and to paint him as he is—would be impossible. Enough has been observed to illustrate the propriety of the exclamation, "Lord, what is man!" Perhaps some of my readers may attempt to deny or extenuate the charge, and may plead, that I have not been describing mankind, but some of the most abandoned of the species, who hardly deserve the name of men. But I have already provided against this exception. It is human nature I describe; and the vilest and most profligate individuals cannot sin beyond the powers and limits of that nature which they possess in common with the more mild and moderate. Though there may be a difference in the fruitfulness of trees, yet the production of one apple decides the nature of the tree upon which it grew, as certainly as if it had produced a thousand: so in the present case, should it be allowed that these enormities cannot be found in all people, it would be a sufficient confirmation of what I have advanced, if they can be found in any; unless it could be likewise proved, that those who appeared more wicked than others, were of a different species from the rest.

But I need not make this concession; they must be insensible indeed who do not feel something within them so very contrary to our common notions of goodness, as would perhaps make them rather submit to be banished from human society, than to be compelled to disclose to their fellow-creatures every thought and desire which arises in their hearts.

Many useful reflections may be drawn from this unpleasant subject. We cannot at present conceive how much we owe to the guardian care of Divine Providence, that any of us are preserved in peace and safety for a single day in such a world as this. Live where we will, we have those near us, who, both by nature, and by the power which

Satan has over them, are capable of the most atrocious crimes. But He whom they know not, restrains them, so that they cannot do the things that they would. When he suspends the restraint, they act immediately; then we hear of murders, rapes, and outrages. But did not the Lord reign with a strong hand, such evils would be perpetrated every hour, and no one would be safe in the house or in the field. God's ordinance of civil government is one great means of preserving the peace of society; but this is in many cases inadequate. **The heart of man, when fully bent upon evil, will not be intimidated or stopped by gibbets and racks.**

How wonderful is the love of God in giving his Son to die for such wretches! And how strong and absolute is the necessity of a new birth, if we would be happy! Can beasts and devils inherit the kingdom of God? The due consideration of this subject is likewise needful, to preserve believers in an humble, thankful, watchful frame of spirit. Such we once were, and such, with respect to the natural principle remaining in us, which the Apostle calls the flesh, or the old man, we still are! **The propensities of fallen nature are not eradicated in the children of God**, though by grace they are made partakers of a new principle, which enables them, in the Lord's strength, to resist and mortify the body of sin, so that it cannot reign in them. Yet they are liable to sad surprisals; and the histories of Aaron, David, Solomon, and Peter, are left on record, to teach us what evil is latent in the hearts of the best men, and what they are capable of doing if left but a little to themselves. "Lord, what is man!"

The nature of fallen man agrees to the description the Apostle has given us of his boasted wisdom: it is earthly, sensual, devilish. I have attempted some general delineation of it in the preceding portion; but the height of its malignity cannot be properly estimated, unless we consider its actings with respect to the light of the Gospel. The

Jews were extremely wicked at the time of our Lord's appearance upon earth; yet he said of them, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin:" that is, as the light and power of his ministry deprived them of all excuse for continuing in sin, so it proved the occasion of showing their wickedness in the most aggravated manner; and all their other sins were but faint proofs of the true state of their hearts, if compared with the discovery they made of themselves, by their pertinacious opposition to him.

In this sense, what the Apostle has observed of the Law of Moses, may be applied to the Gospel of Christ: it entered, that sin might abound. If we would estimate the utmost extent of human depravity, and the strongest effects it is capable of producing, we must select our instances from the conduct of those to whom the Gospel is known. The Indians, who roast their enemies alive, give sufficient proof that man is barbarous to his own kind; which may likewise be easily demonstrated without going so far from home: but the preaching of the Gospel discovers the enmity of the heart against God, in ways and degrees of which unenlightened savages and heathens are not capable.

By the Gospel, I now mean not merely the doctrine of salvation as it lies in the holy Scripture, but that public and authoritative dispensation of this doctrine, which the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to his true ministers; who, having been themselves, by the power of his grace, brought out of darkness into marvelous light, are by His Holy Spirit qualified and sent forth to declare to their fellow-sinners what they have seen, and felt, and tasted, of the word of life. Their commission is, to exalt the Lord alone, to stain the pride of all human glory. They are to set forth the evil and demerit of sin; the strictness, spirituality, and sanction of the law of God; the total apostasy of mankind; and from these premises to demonstrate the

utter impossibility of a sinner's escaping condemnation by any works or endeavors of his own; and then to proclaim a full and free salvation from sin and wrath, by faith in the name, blood, obedience, and mediation of God manifest in the flesh; together with a denunciation of eternal misery to all who shall finally reject the testimony which God has given of his Son.

Though these several branches of the will of God respecting sinners, and other truths in connection with them, are plainly revealed and repeatedly inculcated in the Bible; and though the Bible is to be found in almost every house; yet we see, in fact, it is a sealed book; little read, little understood, and therefore but little regarded, except in those places which the Lord is pleased to favor with ministers who can confirm them from their own experience; and who, by a sense of his constraining love, and the worth of souls, are animated to make the faithful discharge of their ministry the one great business of their lives: who aim not to possess the wealth, but to promote the welfare of their hearers; are equally regardless of the frowns or smiles of the world; and count not their lives dear, so that they may be wise and successful in winning souls to Christ.

When the Gospel, in this sense of the word, first comes to a place, though the people are going on in sin, they may be said to sin ignorantly; they have not yet been warned of their danger. Some are drinking down iniquity like water: others more soberly burying themselves alive in the cares and business of the world: others find a little time for what they call religious duties, which they persevere in, though they are utter strangers to the nature or the pleasure of spiritual worship; partly, as thereby they think to bargain with God, and to make amends for such sins as they do not choose to relinquish; and partly because it gratifies their pride, and affords

them (as they think) some ground for saying, "God, I thank you I am not as other men."

The preached Gospel declares the vanity and danger of these several ways which sinners choose to walk in. It declares, and demonstrates, that, different as they appear from each other, they are equally remote from the path of safety and peace, and all tend to the same point, the destruction of those who persist in them. At the same time it provides against that despair into which men would be otherwise plunged, when convinced of their sins, by revealing the immense love of God, the glory and grace of Christ, and inviting all to come to him, that they may obtain pardon, life, and happiness. In a word, the gospel shows the pit of hell under men's feet, and opens the gate and points out the way to heaven. Let us now briefly observe the effects it produces in those who do not receive it as the power of God unto salvation. These effects are various, as tempers and circumstances vary; but they may all lead us to adopt the Psalmist's exclamation, "Lord, what is man!"

Many, who have heard the Gospel once or a few times, will hear it no more; **it awakens their scorn, their hatred, and rage.** They pour contempt upon the wisdom of God, despise his goodness, defy His power; and their very looks express the spirit of the rebellious Jews, who told the prophet Jeremiah to his face, "As to the word which you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to you at all." Those ministers who preach it, are accounted as men who turn the world upside down; and the people who receive it, fools or hypocrites. The word of the Lord is a burden to them, and they hate it with a total hatred. How strongly is the disposition of the natural heart manifested by the confusion which often takes place in families, where the Lord is pleased to awaken one or two in a house, while the rest remain in their sins! To profess, or even to be

suspected of, an attachment to the Gospel of Christ, is frequently considered and treated as the worst of crimes, sufficient to cancel the strongest obligations of family or friendship. Parents, upon such a provocation, will hate their children, and children ridicule their parents: many find, agreeable to our Lord's declaration, that from the time a sense of his love engaged their hearts to love him again, their worst foes have been those of their own household; and that those who expressed the greatest love and tenderness for them before their conversion, can now hardly bear to see them.

The bulk of a people will perhaps continue to hear, at least now and then; and to those who do, the Spirit of God usually, at one time or other, bears testimony to the truth: their consciences are struck, and for a season they believe and tremble. But what is the consequence? No man who has taken poison seeks more earnestly or speedily for an antidote, than those do for something to stifle and smother their convictions. They run to company, to drink, to anything, for relief against the unwelcome intrusion of serious thoughts; and when they succeed, and recover their former indifference, they rejoice as if they had escaped some great danger. The next step is, to ridicule their own convictions; and next to that, if they see any of their acquaintance under the like impressions, to use every art, and strain every nerve, that they may render them as obstinate as themselves. For this purpose, they watch as a fowler for the bird; flatter or revile, tempt or threaten: and if they can prevail, and are the occasion of hardening any in their sins, they rejoice and triumph, as if they accounted it their interest and their glory, to ruin the souls of their fellow-creatures.

By frequent hearing, they receive more light. They are compelled to know, whether they will or not, that the wrath of God hangs over the children of disobedience. They carry a sting in their consciences, and

at times feel themselves most miserable, and cannot but wish they had never been born, or that they had been dogs or toads, rather than rational creatures. Yet they harden themselves still more. They affect to be happy and at ease, and force themselves to wear a smile when anguish preys upon their hearts. They blaspheme the way of truth, watch for the faults of professors, and with a malicious joy publish and aggravate them. They see perhaps how the wicked die, but are not alarmed; they see the righteous die, but are not moved. Neither providences nor ordinances, mercies nor judgments, can stop them; for they are determined to go on and perish with their eyes open, rather than submit to the Gospel.

But they do not always openly reject the Gospel truths. Some, who profess to approve and receive them, do thereby discover the evils of the heart of man, if possible, in a yet stronger light. They make Christ the minister of sin, and turn his grace into licentiousness. Like Judas, they say, Hail, Master! and betray him. This is the highest pitch of iniquity. They pervert all the doctrines of the Gospel. From election they draw an excuse for continuing in their evil ways; and contend for salvation without works, because they love not obedience. They extol the righteousness of Christ, but hold it in opposition to personal holiness. In a word, because they hear that God is good, they determine to persist in evil. "Lord, what is man!"

Thus willful and impenitent sinners go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. The word which they despise becomes to them a savor of death unto death. **They take different courses, but all are traveling down to the same pit;** and, unless sovereign mercy interposes, they will soon sink to rise no more. The final event is usually two fold. Many, after they have been more or less shaken by the word, settle in formality. If hearing would supply the place of faith, love, and obedience, they would do well; but by

degrees they become sermon-proof; the truths which once struck them lose their power by being often heard: and thus multitudes live and die in darkness, though the light has long shone around them.

Others are more openly given up to a reprobate mind. Contempt of the Gospel makes Infidels, Deists, and Atheists. They are filled with a spirit of delusion to believe a lie. These are scoffers, walking after their own lusts, for where the principles of true religion are given up, the conduct will be vile and abominable. Such people sport themselves with their own deceivings, and strongly prove the truth of the Gospel while they dispute against it. We often find that people of this cast have formerly been the subjects of strong convictions; but when the evil spirit has seemed to depart for a season, and returns again, the last state of that person is worse than the first.

It is not improbable that some of my readers may meet with their own characters under one or other of the views I have given of the desperate wickedness of the heart, in its actings against the truth. May the Spirit of God constrain them to read with attention! Your case is dangerous, but I would hope not utterly desperate. Jesus is mighty to save. His grace can pardon the most aggravated offenses, and subdue the most inveterate habits of sin. The Gospel you have hitherto slighted, resisted, or opposed, is still the power of God unto salvation. The blood of Jesus, upon which you have hitherto trampled, speaks better things than the blood of Abel, and is of virtue to cleanse those whose sins are scarlet and crimson, and to make them white as snow. As yet you are spared; but it is high time to stop, to throw down your arms of rebellion, and humble yourselves at his feet. If you do, you may yet escape; but if not, know assuredly that wrath is coming upon you to the uttermost; and you will shortly find, to your unspeakable dismay, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The Christian and the World

November, 1776

Dear sir,

My London journey, which prevented my writing in October, made me amends by an opportunity of seeing you in person. Such seasons are not only pleasant at the time—but afford me pleasure in the review. I could have wished the half hour we were together by ourselves prolonged to half a day. The subject you were pleased to suggest has been often upon my mind; and glad would I be, were I able to offer you anything satisfactory upon it. There is no doubt but *first religious impressions* are usually mingled with much of a legal spirit; and that *conscience* at such a time, is not only tender—but misinformed and scrupulous. And I believe, as you intimated, that when the mind is more enlightened, and we feel a liberty from many fetters we had imposed upon ourselves, we are in danger of verging too far towards the other extreme.

It seems to me—that no person can adjust and draw the line exactly for another. There are so many particulars in every situation, of which a stranger cannot be a competent judge, and the best human advice is mixed with such defects, that it is not right to expect others to be absolutely guided by our rules, nor is it safe for us implicitly to adopt the decisions or practices of others. But the Scripture undoubtedly furnishes sufficient and infallible rules for every person, however circumstance; and the throne of grace is appointed for us to wait upon the Lord for the best exposition of his precepts. Thus David often prays to be led in the right way, in the path of judgment. "Show me the path where I should walk, O Lord; point out the right

road for me to follow. Lead me by Your truth and teach me, for You are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in You." Psalm 25:4-5

By frequent prayer, and close acquaintance with the Scripture, and a habitual attention to the frame of our hearts, there is a certain delicacy of spiritual taste and discernment to be acquired, which renders a proper judgement concerning the nature and limits of the *Adiaphora*, (questionable things) as they are called, or how near we may go to the utmost bounds of what is right, without being wrong, quite unnecessary. Love to Christ is the clearest and most persuasive factor; and when our love to the Lord is in lively exercise, and the rule of his Word is in our eye—we seldom make great mistakes!

And I believe the over-doings of a young convert, proceeding from an honest simplicity of heart, and a desire of pleasing the Lord, are more acceptable in his sight—than a certain coolness of conduct which frequently takes place afterward, when we are apt to look back with pity upon our former weakness, and secretly to applaud ourselves for our present greater attainments in knowledge, though perhaps (alas that it should ever be so!) we may have lost as much in warmth, as we have gained in light.

From the time we know the Lord, and are bound to him by the cords of love and gratitude, the two chief points we should have in our view, I apprehend, are to maintain communion with him in our own souls, and to glorify him in the sight of men. Agreeable to these views, though the Scripture does not enumerate or infallibly decide for or against many things which some plead for, and others condemn; yet it furnishes us with some general rules, which, if rightly applied, will perhaps go a good way towards settling the debate, at least to the satisfaction of those who would rather please

God than man. Some of these rules I will just mark to you: Rom. 12:1-2; 1Co. 8:13, and 1Co. 10:31; 2Co. 6:17; Eph. 4:30; Eph. 5:11, Eph. 5:15, Eph. 5:16; 1Th. 5:22; Eph. 6:18 : to which I may add, as suitable to the present times, Isa. 22:12; Luke 21:34. I apprehend the spirit of these and similar passages of Scripture (for it would be easy to adduce a larger number) will bring a Christian under such restrictions as follow.

To avoid and forbear, for his own sake, whatever has a tendency to dampen and indispose spiritual mindedness; for such things, if they are not condemned as sinful per se; if they are not absolutely unlawful; yes though they are, when duly regulated, lawful and right (for often our chief snares are entwined with our blessings); yet if they have a repeated and evident tendency to deaden our hearts to Divine things, of which each person's experience must determine, there must be something in them, either in season, measure, or circumstance, wrong to us; and let them promise what they will, they do but rob us of our gold—to pay us with pebbles. For the light of God's countenance, and an open cheerfulness of spirit in walking with him in private, is our chief joy; and we must be already greatly hurt, if anything can be pursued, allowed, or rested in, as a tolerable substitute for it.

For the sake of the church, and the influence that example may have upon his fellow-Christians, the law of charity and prudence will often require a believer to abstain from some things—not because they are unlawful—but because they are harmful to others. Thus the Apostle, though strenuous for the right of his Christian liberty, would have abridged himself of the use, so as to eat no meat, rather than offend a weak brother, rather than mislead him to act against the present light of his conscience.

Upon this principle, if I could, without hurt to myself, attend some public amusements, as a concert or oratorio, and return from thence with a warm heart to my closet (the possibility of which, in my own case, I greatly question); yet I should think it my duty to forbear, lest some weaker brother than myself should be encouraged by me to make the like experiment, though in their own minds they might fear it was wrong, and have no other reason to think it lawful—but because I did it. In which case I should suspect, that, though I received no harm—they would.

I have known and conversed with some who have made shipwreck of their profession, who have dated their first decline, from imitating others, whom they thought wiser and better than themselves, in such kinds of compliances.

It seems that an obligation of this sort of self-denial, rises and is strengthened in proportion to the weight and influence of our characters. Were I in private life, I do not know that I would think it sinful to hunt for partridge—but, as a minister, I no more dare do it, than I dare join in a drunken frolic, because I know it would give offense to some, and be pleaded for as a license by others.

There is a duty, and a charity likewise, which we owe to the world at large, as well as a faithfulness to God and his grace, in our necessary converse among them. This seems to require, that, though we should not be needlessly singular—yet, for their instruction, and for the honor of our Lord and Master, we should keep up a certain kind of singularity, and show ourselves called to be a *separated people*: that, though the providence of God has given us callings and relations to fill up (in which we cannot be too exact)—yet we are not of this world—but belong to another community, and act from other principles,

by other rules, and to other ends, than the generality of those about us.

I have observed that the world will often leave professors in quiet possession of their notions, and sentiments, and places of worship—provided they will not be too stiff in the matter of conformity with their more general customs and amusements. But I fear many of them have had their prejudices strengthened against our holy religion by such compliances, and have thought, that, if there were such joy and comfort to be found in the ways of God as they hear from our pulpits, professors would not, in such numbers, and so often, run among them to get relief from the burden of time hanging upon their hands.

As our Lord Jesus is the great representative of his people in heaven, he does them the honor to continue a succession of them as his representatives upon earth. Happy are those who are favored with most of the holy unction, and best enabled to manifest to all around them, by their spirit, tempers, and conversation, what is the proper design and genuine effect of his Gospel upon the hearts of sinners.

In our way of little life in the country, serious people often complain of the snares they meet with from worldly people, and yet they must mix with them to get a livelihood. I advise them, if they can, to do their business with the world as they do it in the rain. If their business calls them abroad, they will not leave it undone for fear of being a little wet; but then, when it is done, they presently seek shelter, and will not stand in the rain for pleasure. Just so, providential and necessary calls of duty, which lead us into the world, will not hurt us, if we find the spirit of the world unpleasant, and are glad to retire from it, and keep out of it as much as our relative duties will permit. That which is our *cross*—is not so likely to

be our *snare*. But if that spirit, which we should always watch and pray against, infects and assimilates our minds to itself—then we are sure to suffer loss, and act below the dignity of our profession.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:16. The value of **time** is to be taken into the account. Time is a precious talent, and our Christian profession opens a wide field for the due improvement of it. Much of it has been already lost—and therefore we are exhorted to redeem it.

Many things which custom pleads for, will not be suitable to a Christian, for this one reason—that they are not consistent with the simplest notion of the redemption of time. It is generally said—that we need relaxation. I allow it in a sense—the Lord Himself has provided it; and because our spirits are too weak to be always upon the wing in meditation and prayer, He has appointed to all men, from the king downwards, something to do in a secular way.

And when everything of this sort in each person's situation is properly attended to, if the heart is in a right state—spiritual concerns will present themselves, as affording the noblest, sweetest, and most interesting relaxation from the cares and toils of life. On the other hand, secular work will be the best relaxation and unbending of the mind from pious exercises. Between the two, perhaps there ought to be but little mere leisure time. A life, in this sense divided between God and the world, is desirable, when one part of it is spent in retirement, seeking after and conversing with Him whom our souls love; and the other part of it employed in active services for the good of our family, friends, the church, and society, for His sake. Every hour which does not fall in with one or other of these views, I apprehend is *lost* time.

The day in which we live seems likewise to call for something of a peculiar spirit in the Lord's people. It is a day of abounding sin, and I fear a day of impending judgment. The world, as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, is secure. We are soon to have a day of apparent humiliation; but the just causes for it are not confined to one day—but will exist, and too probably increase, every day. If I am not mistaken in the *signs of the times*, there never was, within the annals of the English history, a period in which the spirit and employment described Eze. 9:4, could be more suitable than the present, "Go throughout the city—and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." The Lord calls for mourning and weeping—but the words of many are stout against him! New kinds of evil are invented almost daily; and the language of those who bear the greatest sway in what is called *the polite circle*, I mean, the interpretative language of their hearts, is like that of the rebellious Jews, Jer. 44:16-17, etc., "As for the word which you have spoken—we will not hearken unto you at all!"

In short, things are coming to a point, and it seems to be almost putting to the vote whether the *Lord* or *Baal* is God. In this state of affairs, methinks we cannot be too explicit in avowing our attachment to the Lord, nor too careful in avoiding an improper relationships with those who are in confederacy against him. We know not how soon we may greatly need that mark of providential protection which is given to those who sigh and cry for our abominations.

Upon the whole, it appears to me, that it is more honorable, comfortable, and safe (if we cannot exactly hit the golden mean), to be thought by some too scrupulous and precise—than actually to be found too compliant with those things which, if not absolutely

contrary to a Divine commandment, are hardly compatible with the genius of the Gospel, or conformable to the mind which was in Christ Jesus, which ought also to be in his people. The places and amusements which the world frequent and admire, where occasions and temptations to sin are cultivated, where the law of what is called *custom* is the only law which may not be violated with impunity, where sinful passions are provoked and indulged, where the fear of God is so little known or regarded—that those who do fear him must hold their tongues though they should hear his name blasphemed—can hardly be a Christian's voluntary chosen ground. Yet I fear these characters will apply to every kind of social amusement or assembly in the kingdom.

As to *family connections*, I cannot think we are bound to break or slight them. But as believers and their friends often live as it were—in *two elements*, there is a *mutual awkwardness*, which makes their interactions rather dry and tedious. But upon that account they are less frequent than they would otherwise be, which seems an advantage. Both sides keep up returns of civility and affection; but as they cannot unite in sentiment and leading inclination, they will not contrive to be very often together, except there is something considerable given up by one or the other; and I think Christians ought to be very cautious what concessions they make upon this account. But, as I said at the beginning, no general positive rules can be laid down.

I have simply given you such thoughts as have occurred to me while writing, without study, and without coherence. I dare not be dogmatic; but I think what I have written is agreeable both to particular texts and to the general tenor of Scripture.

True Patriotism!

Dear friend,

Allow me to say, that it excites both my wonder and concern, that a *Christian minister* such as yourself, should think it worth his while to attempt *political reforms*. When I look around upon the present state of the nation, such an attempt appears to me, to be no less vain and foolish, than it would be to paint the *cabin*—while the *ship* is sinking! Or to decorate the *parlor*—while the *house* is on fire!

When our Lord Jesus was upon earth, He refused to get involved in disputes or politics, "Friend, who appointed Me a *judge* or arbitrator over you?" Luke 12:14. "My kingdom is not of this world! If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight!" John 18:36. God's children belong to a kingdom which is not of this world; they are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, and a part of their Scriptural character is, that they are the "quiet in the land." Psalm 35:19.

Satan has many contrivances to amuse people, and to divert their thoughts from their real danger!

My dear sir, my prayer to God for you is—that He may induce you to employ the talents He has given you, in pointing out *sin* as the great cause and source of every existing evil; and to engage those who love and fear Him, (instead of wasting time in political speculations, for which very few of them are competent,) to sigh and cry for our abounding abominations, and to stand in the breach, by prayer, that God's wrath may yet be averted, and our national mercies prolonged! This, I think, is **true patriotism**—the best way in which people in private life may serve their country.

I consider the ungodly as *saws* and *hammers* in the hand of the Lord. So far as they are *His instruments*, they will succeed—but not an inch further! Their wrath shall praise Him, and be subservient to His designs!

If *our lot* is so cast that we can exercise our ministry free from stripes, fines, imprisonments, and death—it is *more* than the gospel has promised to us! If Christians were quiet when under the cruel governments of Nero and other wicked persecutors, when they were hunted down like wild beasts—then *we* ought to be not only *quiet* but very *thankful* now! It was then accounted an *honor* to suffer for Christ and the 'offence of the cross'!

Those are to be greatly pitied, who boast of their 'liberty'—and yet they do not consider that they are in the *most deplorable bondage* as the slaves of *sin* and *Satan*, under the curse of God's law and His eternal wrath! Oh! for a voice to reach their hearts, that they may know their true and dreadful state—and seek deliverance from their horrific thralldom! May you and I labor to direct them to the *one thing*, which is absolutely needful, and abundantly sufficient.

If I had the wisdom or influence to soothe the angry passions of mankind—I would gladly employ them! But I am a stranger and a pilgrim here in this world. My charter, my rights and my treasures, are all in heaven—and there my *heart* ought to be. In a very short time, I may be removed (and perhaps suddenly) into the unseen and eternal world—where all that now causes so much *bustle upon earth*—will be of no more importance to me—than the events which took place among the antediluvians!

In the hour, when death shall open the door into eternity—many things which now assume an 'air of importance', will be found as

light and unsubstantial as a child's dream!

How crucial then, is it for me—to be found watching, with my lamp burning, diligently engaged in my proper calling! For the Lord has not called me to set *governments* right—but to *preach the gospel*, to proclaim the glory of His name, and to endeavor to win souls! "Let the dead bury their own dead—but *you go and proclaim the kingdom of God!*" Luke 9:60. Happy is that servant, whom his Master finds so doing, when He returns!

As you have forced me to respond—both *duty* and *love* have obliged me to be faithful and free in giving you my thoughts.

I recommend you to the care and blessing of the great Shepherd and Savior; and remain for His sake, your affectionate friend and brother,
John Newton

The Practical Influence of Faith

Sir,

The use and importance of faith, as it respects a sinner's justification before God, has been largely insisted on. **But faith is likewise of great use and importance in the daily concerns of life.** Faith gives evidence and reality to things not seen, and realizes the great truths of the Gospel, so as that they become abiding and living principles of support and direction while we are passing through this wilderness. Thus, faith is as the eye and the hand, without which we cannot take one step with certainty, or attempt any service with

success. It is to be wished, that this practical exercise of faith were duly attended to by all professors. We would not then meet with so many cases which perplex us, and leave us at a great difficulty to reconcile what we see in some of whom we would willingly hope well—with what we read in Scripture of the inseparable attendants of a true and living faith. For how can we but be staggered, when we hear people speaking the language of assurance—that they know their acceptance with God through Christ, and have not the least doubt of their interest in all the promises—while at the same time we see them under the influence of unsanctified tempers, of a proud, passionate, worldly, selfish, or churlish behavior?

It is not only plain, from the general tenor of Scripture, that a covetous, a proud, or a censorious spirit, is no more consistent with the spirit of the Gospel, than drunkenness or whoredom; but there are many express texts directly pointed against the evils which too often are found among professors. Thus the Apostle James assures us, "That if any man seems to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, his religion is vain;" and the Apostle John, "That if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him;" and he seems to apply this character to any man, whatever his profession or pretenses may be, "who having this world's goods, and seeing his brother have need, shuts up his compassion from him." Surely these texts more than intimate, that **that faith which justifies the soul, does likewise receive grace from Jesus, whereby the heart is purified, and the life regulated as befits the Gospel of Christ.**

There are too many who would have preaching limited to the privileges of believers; and when the *fruits of faith*, and the tempers of the mind, which should be manifest in those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," are inculcated, think they sufficiently evade all

that is said, by calling it *legal preaching*. I would be no advocate for legal preaching; but we must not be deterred, by the fear of a hard word, from declaring the whole counsel of God; and we have the authority and example of Paul, who was a champion of the doctrines of free grace, to animate us in exhorting professors to "walk worthy of God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory." And indeed the expression of a believer's privilege is often misunderstood. It is a believer's privilege to walk with God in the exercise of faith, and, by the power of his Spirit, to mortify the whole body of sin, to gain a growing victory over the world and self, and to make daily advances in conformity to the mind of Christ. And nothing that we profess to know, believe, or hope for, deserves the name of a privilege, farther than we are **influenced by it to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness**. Whoever is possessed of true faith, will not confine his inquiries to the single point of his acceptance with God, or be satisfied with the distant hope of heaven hereafter. He will be likewise solicitous how he may glorify God in the world, and enjoy such foretastes of heaven as are attainable while he is yet upon earth.

Faith, then, in its practical exercise, has for its object the whole word of God, and forms its estimate of all things with which the soul is at present concerned, according to the standard of Scripture. Like Moses, it "endures, as seeing him who is invisible."

When our Lord was upon earth, and conversed with his disciples, their eyes and hearts were fixed upon him. In danger he was their defender; their guide when in perplexity; and to him they looked for the solution of all their doubts, and the supply of all their needs. He is now withdrawn from our eyes; but faith sets him still before us, for the same purposes, and, according to its degree, with the same effects, as if we actually saw him! His spiritual presence,

apprehended by faith, is a restraint from evil, an encouragement to every service, and affords a present refuge and help in every time of trouble.

To this is owing the delight a believer takes in ordinances, because there he meets his Lord: and to this, likewise, it is owing, that his religion is not confined to public occasions; but he is the same person in secret as he appears to be in the public assembly; for he worships him who sees in secret; and dares appeal to his all-seeing eye for the sincerity of his desires and intentions. By faith he is enabled to use prosperity with moderation; and knows and feels, that what the world calls *good* is of small value, unless it is accompanied with the presence and blessings of Him whom his soul loves.

And his faith upholds him under all trials, by assuring him, that every painful dispensation is under the direction of his Lord; that chastisements are a token of his love; that the season, measure, and continuance of his sufferings, are appointed by Infinite Wisdom, and designed to work for his everlasting good; and that grace and strength shall be afforded him, according to his need. Thus, his heart being fixed, trusting in the Lord, to whom he has committed all his concerns; and knowing that his best interests are safe; he is not greatly afraid of evil tidings, but enjoys a stable peace in the midst of a changing world. For, though he cannot tell what a day may bring forth, he believes that he who has invited and enabled him to cast all his cares upon him, will allow nothing to befall him but what shall be made subservient to his chief desire—the glory of God in the sanctification and final salvation of his soul. And if, through the weakness of his flesh, he is liable to be startled by the first impression of a sharp and sudden trial, he quickly flees to his strong refuge, remembers it is the Lord's doing, resigns himself to his will, and patiently expects a happy outcome.

By the same principle of faith, a believer's conduct is regulated towards his fellow-creatures; and in the discharge of the several duties and relations of life, his great aim is to please God, and to let his light shine in the world. He believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness, and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of his Lord. This gives him a habitual tenderness and gentleness of spirit. Humbled under a sense of much forgiveness to himself, he finds it easy to forgive others, if he has anything against any. A due sense of what he is in the sight of the Lord, preserves him from giving way to anger, malice, and resentment. He is not easily provoked, but is "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to become angry;" and if offended, easy to be entreated, and disposed, not only to yield to a reconciliation, but to seek it.

As Jesus is his life, and righteousness, and strength—so he is his **pattern**. By faith he contemplates and studies this great Exemplar of philanthropy. With a holy ambition he treads in the footsteps of his Lord and Master, and learns of him to be meek and lowly, to requite injuries with kindness, and to overcome evil with good. From the same views, by faith he derives a benevolent spirit, and, according to his sphere and ability, he endeavors to promote the welfare of all around him. The *law of love* being thus written in his heart, and his soul set at liberty from the low and narrow dictates of a selfish spirit, his language will be truth, and his dealings equity. His promise may be depended on, without the interposition of oath, bond, or witness; and the feelings of his own heart, under the direction of an enlightened conscience and the precepts of Scripture, prompt him "to do unto others as he would desire they, in the like circumstances, should do unto him."

If he is a master, he is gentle and compassionate; if a servant, he is faithful and obedient; for in either relation he acts by faith, under the

eye of his Master in heaven. If he is a trader, he neither dares nor wishes to take advantage either of the ignorance or the necessities of those with whom he deals. And the same principle of love influences his whole conversation. A sense of his own infirmities makes him sympathetic to those of others: he will not readily believe bad reports about them, without sufficient proof; and even then, he will not repeat them, unless he is lawfully called to it. He believes that the precept, "Speak evil of no man," is founded upon the same authority as those which forbid committing adultery or murder; and therefore he "keeps his tongue as with a bridle."

Lastly, Faith is of daily use as a preservative from a compliance with the corrupt customs and maxims of the world. The believer, though in the world, is not of it; by faith he triumphs over its smiles and enticements. He sees that all that is in the world, suited to gratify the desires of the flesh or the eye, is not only to be avoided as sinful, but as incompatible with his best pleasures. He will mix with the world so far as is necessary, in the discharge of the duties of that station of life in which the providence of God has placed him, but no farther. His leisure and inclinations are engaged in a different pursuit. Those who fear the Lord are his chosen companions: and the blessings he derives from the word, and throne, and ordinances of grace, make him look upon the poor pleasures and amusements of those who live without God in the world, with a mixture of disdain and pity. And by faith he is armored against the world's frowns. He will obey God rather than man; he will "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will rather reprove them." And if, upon this account, he should be despised and injuriously treated, whatever loss he suffers in such a cause, he accounts his gain, and esteems such disgrace his glory.

I am not aiming to draw a perfect character, but to show **the proper effects of that faith which justifies, which purifies the heart, works by love, and overcomes the world.** A habitual endeavor to possess such a frame of spirit, and thus to adorn the Gospel of Christ, and that with growing success, is what I am persuaded you are not a stranger to; and I am afraid that those who can content themselves with aiming at anything short of this in their profession, are too much strangers to themselves, and to the nature of that liberty with which Jesus has promised to make his people free. That you may go on from strength to strength, increasing in the light and image of our Lord and Savior, is my sincere prayer.

The Inefficacy of Mere Knowledge

Dear Sir,

To be enabled to form a clear, consistent, and comprehensive judgment of the truths revealed in the Scripture, is a great privilege; but those who possess it are exposed to the temptation of thinking too highly of themselves, and too lowly of others, especially of those who not only refuse to adopt their sentiments, but venture to oppose them. We see few controversial writings, however excellent in other respects, but are tinged with this spirit of self-superiority. And if they are attentive to what passes in their hearts, may feel it working within them, upon a thousand occasions; though, so far as it prevails, it brings forcibly home to ourselves the charge of ignorance and inconsistency, which we are so ready to fix upon our opponents.

I know nothing, as a means, more likely to correct this evil, than a serious consideration of *the amazing difference between our acquired judgment, and our actual experience*; or, in other words, *how little influence our knowledge and judgment have upon our own conduct*. This may confirm to us the truth and propriety of the Apostle's observation, "If any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know." Not that we are bound to be insensible that the Lord has taught us what we were once ignorant of; nor is it possible that we should be so; but because, if we estimate our knowledge by its effects, and value it no farther than it is experimental and operative (which is the proper standard whereby to try it), we shall find it so faint and feeble as hardly to deserve the name.

How firmly, for instance, are we persuaded, in our judgments, that **God is omnipresent!** Great as the difficulties may be which attend our conceptions of this point, the truth itself is controverted by few. It is generally acknowledged by unawakened people; and, I may add, too frequently known even by believers—as if they knew it not! If the eyes of the Lord are in every place, how strong a guard should this thought be upon the conduct of those who profess to fear him! We know how we are often affected when in the presence of a fellow-worm: if he is one on whom we depend, or who is considerably our superior in life—how careful are we to compose our behavior, and to avoid whatever might be deemed improper or offensive!

Is it not strange, that those who have taken their ideas of the Divine majesty, holiness, and purity, from the Scriptures, and are not wholly insensible of their inexpressible obligations to regulate all they say or do by his precepts—should upon many occasions be betrayed into improprieties of behavior—from which the presence of a nobleman,

or prince, would have effectually restrained them, yes, sometimes perhaps even the presence of a child?

Even in the exercise of prayer, by which we profess to draw near the Lord, the consideration that his eye is upon us, has little power to engage our attention, or prevent our thoughts from wandering, like the fool's eyes, to the ends of the earth. What would we think of a person, who, being admitted into the king's presence, upon business of the greatest importance, should break off in the midst of his address, to pursue a butterfly? Could such an instance of weakness be met with, it would be but a faint emblem of the inconsistencies which those who are acquainted with their own hearts can often charge themselves with in prayer. They are not wholly ignorant in what a frame of spirit it becomes a needy dependent sinner to approach that God, before whom the angels are represented as veiling their faces; yet, in defiance of their better judgment, their attention is diverted from him with whom they have to do, to the merest trifles; they are not able to realize that presence with which they believe themselves to be surrounded, but speak as if they were speaking into the air!

Farther, if our sense that God is always present, was in any good measure answerable to the conviction of our judgment, would it not be an effectual preservative from the many importunate though groundless fears with which we are harassed? God says, "Fear not, I am with you;" he promises to be a shield and a guard to those who put their trust in him; yet, though we profess to believe his word, and to hope that he is our protector, we seldom think ourselves safe, even in the path of duty, a moment longer than danger is kept out of our view. Little reason have we to value ourselves upon our knowledge of this indisputable truth, when it has no more *effective and habitual influence upon our conduct!*

The doctrine of **God's sovereignty** likewise, though not so generally owned as the former, is no less fully assented to by those who are called Calvinists. We zealously contend for this point, in our debates with the Arminians; and are ready to wonder that any should be hardy enough to dispute the Creator's right to do what he will with his own. While we are only engaged in defense of the election of grace, and have a comfortable hope that we are ourselves of that number, we seem so convinced, by the arguments the Scripture affords us in support of this truth, that we can hardly forbear charging our adversaries with perverse obstinacy and pride, for opposing it.

Undoubtedly the ground of this opposition lies in the pride of the human heart: but this evil principle is not confined to any party; and occasions frequently arise, when *those who contend for the Divine sovereignty are little more practically influenced by it than their opponents!* This humiliating doctrine concludes as strongly for submission to the will of God, under every circumstance of life, as it does for our acquiescing in his purpose to have saving mercy on whom he will have mercy. But, alas! how often do we find ourselves utterly unable to apply it, so as to reconcile our spirits to those afflictions which he is pleased to allot us!

So far as we are enabled to say, when we are exercised with poverty, or heavy losses or crosses, "I was silent and opened not my mouth, because You are the one who has done this!" so far, and no farther, are we truly convinced that God has a sovereign right to dispose of us, and all our concerns—as he pleases. How often, and how justly, at such seasons, might the argument we offer to others, as sufficient to silence all their objections, be retorted upon ourselves, "Nay, but who are you, O man, who replies against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why have you made me thus?" —a plain

proof that our knowledge is more *notional* than *experimental*. What an inconsistency, that, while we think God is just and righteous in withholding from others the things which pertain to their everlasting peace, we should find it so hard to submit to his dispensations to ourselves in matters of unspeakably less importance!

But the Lord's appointments, to those who fear him, are not only sovereign, but wise and gracious. He has connected their good with his own glory, and is engaged, by promise, to make all things work together for their advantage. **He chooses for his people better than they could choose for themselves!** If they are in heaviness, there is a need-be for it. And he withholds nothing from them but what, upon the whole, it is better they should be without. Thus the Scriptures teach, and thus we profess to believe.

Furnished with these principles, we are at no loss to suggest motives of patience and consolation to our brethren that are afflicted: we can assure **them**, without hesitation, that, if they are savingly interested in the promises, their concerns are in safe hands; that the things which at present are not joyous, but grievous, shall in due season yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness; and that their trials are as certainly mercies—as their comforts. We can prove to them, from the history of Joseph, David, Job, and other instances recorded in Scripture, that, notwithstanding any present dark appearances, it shall certainly be well with the righteous; that God can and will make crooked things straight; and that he often produces the greatest good from those events which we are apt to look upon as evil. From hence we can infer, not only the sinfulness, but the folly, of finding fault with any of God's dispensations. We can tell them, that, at the worst, the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed; and that therefore, under the

greatest pressures, they should so weep as those who expect in a little time to have all their tears wiped away.

But when the case is our own, when we are troubled on every side, or touched in the tenderest part—how difficult is it to feel the force of these reasonings, though we know they are true to a demonstration! Then, unless we are endued with fresh strength from on high, we are as liable to complain and despond, as if we thought our afflictions sprung out of the ground, and the Lord had forgotten to be gracious!

I might proceed to show the difference between our *judgment* when most enlightened, and actual *experience*, with respect to every spiritual truth.

We know there is no proportion between time and eternity, between God and the creature, the favor of the Lord and the favor or the frowns of men; and yet often, when these things are brought into close competition, we are sorely put to it to keep steadfast in the path of duty. No, without new supplies of grace, we would certainly fail in the time of trial, and our knowledge would have no other effect than to render our guilt more inexcusable.

We seem to be as sure that we are weak, sinful, fallible creatures—as we are that we exist; and yet we are prone to act as if we were wise and perfect. In a word, we cannot deny, that a great part of our knowledge is, as I have described it, like the light of the moon, destitute of heat and influence; and yet we can hardly help thinking of ourselves too highly upon the account of it.

May we not say, with the Psalmist, "Lord, what is man!" yes, what an enigma, **what a poor inconsistent creature, is a believer!** In one view, how great is his character and privilege! He knows the

Lord; he knows himself. His understanding is enlightened to apprehend and contemplate the great mysteries of the Gospel. He has just ideas of the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the beauties of holiness, and the nature of true happiness. He was once "darkness, but now he is light in the Lord." He has access to God by Jesus Christ; to whom he is united, and in whom he lives by faith. While the principles he has received are enlivened by the agency of the Holy Spirit, he can do all things. He is humble, gentle, patient, watchful, faithful. He rejoices in afflictions, triumphs over temptation, lives upon the foretastes of eternal glory, and counts not his life dear, so that he may glorify God his Savior, and finish his course with joy.

But his strength is not his own; he is absolutely dependent; and is still encompassed with infirmities, and burdened with a depraved nature. If the Lord withdraws his power, he becomes weak as another man, and drops, as a stone sinks to the earth by its own weight. His inherent knowledge may be compared to the windows of a house, which can transmit the light, but cannot retain it. **Without renewed and continual communications from the Spirit of grace, he is unable to withstand the smallest temptation, to endure the slightest trial, to perform the least service in a due manner, or even to think a good thought!** He knows this, and yet he too often forgets it. But the Lord reminds him of it frequently, by suspending that assistance, without which he can do nothing. Then he feels what he is, and is easily prevailed upon to act in contradiction to his better judgment. Thus repeated experience of his own weakness teaches him by degrees where his strength lies; that it is not in anything that he has already attained, or can call his own, but in the grace, power, and faithfulness of his Savior. He learns to cease from his own understanding, to be ashamed of his best endeavors, to abhor himself in dust and ashes, and to glory only in the Lord!

From hence we may observe, that **believers who have most Biblical knowledge, are not therefore necessarily the most spiritual.** Some may and do walk more honorably and more comfortably with two talents, than others with five. He who experimentally knows his own weakness, and depends simply upon the Lord, will surely thrive, though his acquired knowledge and abilities may be but small. While he who has the greatest gifts, the clearest judgment, and the most extensive knowledge, if he indulges high thoughts of his advantages, is in imminent danger of mistaking, and falling at every step; for the Lord will allow none whom he loves to boast in themselves. He will guide the **meek** with his eye, and fill the hungry with good things—but the **rich** he sends empty away. It is an invariable maxim in His kingdom, that whoever exalts himself shall be abased; but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.

The Advantages of a State of Poverty

My dear Friend,

I confess myself almost ashamed to write to you. You are pinched by poverty, suffer the lack of many things; and your faith is often sharply tried, when you look at your family, and perhaps can hardly conceive how you shall be able to supply them with bread to the end of the week. The Lord has appointed me a different lot. I am favored, not only with the necessities but with the comforts of life. Now I could easily give you plenty of good advice: I could tell you, it is your duty to be patient, and even thankful, in the lower state; that if you have bread and water, it is more than you deserve at the Lord's hands; and that, as you are out of hell, and made a partaker of the

hope of the Gospel, you ought not to think anything hard that you meet with on the way to heaven. If I should say thus, and say no more, you would not dispute the truth of my assertions. But as coming from me, who lives at ease, to you, who are beset with difficulties, you might question their propriety, and think that I know but little of my own heart, and could feel but little for your distress. You would probably compare me to one who would think himself a mariner because he had studied the art of navigation by the fire-side, though he had never seen the sea. Yet I hope, by my frequent converse with the Lord's poor (for I live in the midst of an afflicted and poor people), I have made some observations, which, though not strictly the fruit of my own experience, may not be wholly unseasonable or unacceptable to you.

Whether the rich or the poor, who live without God in the world, are most to be pitied, is not easy to determine. It is a dreadful case to be miserable in both worlds; but yet the parade and seeming prosperity in which some live for a few years will be no abatement, but rather a great aggravation, of their future torment. A madman is equally to be pitied, whether he is laid upon a bed of down, or a bed of straw. **Madness is in the heart of every unregenerate sinner; and the more he possesses of this world's goods, he is so much the more extensively mischievous.** Poverty is so far a negative good, to those who have no other restraint, that it confines the effects of the evil heart within narrower bounds, and the small circle of their immediate connections: whereas the rich, who live under the power of sin, are unfaithful stewards of a larger trust, and by their pernicious influence are often instrumental in diffusing profaneness and licentiousness through a country or a kingdom; besides the innumerable acts of oppression, and the ravages of war, which are perpetrated to gratify the insatiable demands of luxury, ambition, and pride.

But, to leave this; if we turn our eyes from the false maxims of the world, and weigh things in the balance of the sanctuary, I believe we shall find, that *poor Christians*, though they have many trials which call for our compassion, have some advantages above those of the Lord's people to whom he has given a larger share of the good things of the present life. Why else does the Apostle say, "God has chosen the poor?" or why do we see, in fact, that so few of the rich, or wise, or mighty, are called? Certainly he does not choose them because they are poor; for "he is no respecter of persons."

Rather I think we may say, that, knowing what is in the hearts of his people, the nature of the world through which they are to pass, and what circumstances are best suited to manifest the truth and efficacy of his grace, he has, in the general, chosen poverty as the best state for them. Some exceptions he has made, that the sufficiency of his grace may be made known in every state of life; but, for the most part, they are a poor and afflicted people: and in this appointment he has had a regard to their *honor*, their *safety*, and their *comfort*. I have room for but a very brief illustration of these particulars.

Sanctified poverty is an **honorable** state; not so indeed in the judgment of the world; the rich have many friends, the poor are usually despised. But I am speaking of that honor which comes from God only. The poor, who are "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," are honored with the nearest external conformity to Jesus their Savior; who, though he was Lord of all, was pleased for our sakes to make himself so poor, that he had not where to lay his head, and submitted to receive assistance from the contributions of his followers; Luke 8:3. By this astonishing humiliation, he poured contempt upon all human glory, and made the state of poverty honorable; and now "he who reproaches the poor, despises his Maker."

And as he was, so were his Apostles in the world. They were not only destitute of rank, titles, and estates—but were often in hunger and nakedness, and had no certain dwelling-place. To infer from hence, as some have done, that riches, and the accommodations of life, are unsuitable to the state of a Christian, is the mark of a superstitious and legal spirit. There were in those days several believers that were in a state of affluence; as, for instance, Theophilus, whom Luke addresses by a title of honor, 'most noble or excellent'; the same which Paul ascribes to the Roman Governor. But we may safely infer, that that state of life in which our Lord was pleased to converse with men, and which was the lot of his Apostles, and most favored servants, is honorable in the sight of God.

Again: Poverty is honorable, because it affords a peculiar advantage for glorifying God, and evidencing the power of his grace, and the faithfulness of his promises, in the sight of men. A believer, if rich, lives by faith; and his faith meets with various trials. He himself knows by whom he stands; but it is not ordinarily so visible to others, as in the case of the poor. When ministers speak of the all-sufficiency of God to those who trust in him, and the certain effect of the principles of the Gospel, in supporting, satisfying, and regulating the mind of man, the poor are the best and most unsuspected witnesses for the truth of their doctrine. If we are asked, 'Where do these wonderful people live, who can delight themselves in God, esteem a day in his courts better than a thousand, and prefer the light of his countenance to all earthly joy?'—we can confidently send them to the poor of the flock. Among the number who are so called, there are some who will not disappoint our appeal. Let the world, who refuse to believe the preachers, believe their own eyes; and when they see a poor person content, thankful, rejoicing, admiring the Lord's goodness for affording him what they account hard fare, and, in the midst of various pressures, incapable of being bribed by offers, or

terrified by threats, to swerve a step from the path of known duty—let them acknowledge that this is the finger of God. If they harden themselves against this evidence, "neither would they be persuaded though one should arise from the dead."

And as poverty is an honorable, so it is comparatively a safe state. True, it is attended with its peculiar temptations; but it is not near so suitable to draw forth and nourish the two grand corruption's of the heart, self-importance, and an idolatrous cleaving to the world, as the opposite state of riches. Those who are rich in this world, and who know the Lord and their own hearts, feel the wisdom and propriety of the Apostle's charge, "Not to be high-minded, nor to trust in uncertain riches." If poor believers consider the snares to which their rich brethren are exposed, they will rather pray for and pity, than envy them. Their path is slippery; they have reason to cry continually, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" for they live in the midst of the hurries and vanities of the world, are engaged in a large sphere of action, and are incessantly exposed to interruptions and snares. The behavior of all around them reminds them of their supposed consequence: and, by the nature of their situation, they are greatly precluded from plain dealing and friendly advice.

But the poor are not surrounded with flatterers, nor teased with impertinences. They meet with little to stimulate their pride, or to pander to their vanity. They not only believe in their judgments, but are constrained to feel, by the experience of every day, that this world cannot afford them rest. If they have food and clothing, and grace therewith to be content, they have reason to be thankful for an exemption from those splendid cares, and delusive appearances, which are the inseparable attendants of wealth and worldly distinction; and which, if not more burdensome, are, humanly

speaking, much more dangerous, and greater impediments to the progress of a spiritual life, than the ordinary trials of the poor.

The believing poor have likewise, for the most part, the advantage in point of spiritual comfort; and that principally in two respects. First, As they are called to a life of more immediate dependence upon the promise and providence of God (having little else to trust to), they have a more direct and frequent experience of His interposition in their favor. Obadiah was a servant of God, though he lived in the court of Ahab. He, doubtless, had his difficulties in such a situation; but he was not in poverty. He had not only enough for himself in a time of dearth, but was able to impart to others. We may believe, that he well knew he was indebted to the Lord's goodness for his provision; but he could hardly have so sweet, so strong, so sensible an impression of God's watchful care over him as Elijah had, who, when he was deprived of all human support, was fed by the ravens.

Such of the Lord's people who have estates in land, or thousands in the bank, will acknowledge, that even the bread they eat is the gift of the lords bounty; yet having a moral certainty of a provision for life, I would think that they cannot exercise faith in the Divine Providence, with respect to their temporal supplies, so distinctly as the poor, who, having no friend or resource upon earth, are necessitated to look immediately to their Father who is in heaven for their daily bread.

And though it is not given to the world to know what a fellowship is carried on between heaven and earth, nor with what acceptance the prayers of the poor and afflicted enter into the ears of the Lord of hosts; yet many of them have had such proofs of his attention, wisdom, faithfulness, power, and love, in supplying their needs, and opening them a way of relief, when they have been beset with

difficulties on all sides, as have been no less certain and indisputable, I had almost said no less glorious—than the miracles which he wrought for Israel when he divided the Red Sea before them, and gave them food from the clouds. Such evidences of the power of faith, the efficacy of prayer, and the truth of the Scriptures (preferable to mountains of gold and silver, and for which the state of poverty furnishes the most frequent occasions), are a rich overbalance for all its inconveniences.

But, Secondly, I apprehend that the humble and believing poor have, in general, the greatest share of those consolations which are the effect of the light of God's countenance lifted up upon the soul, of his love shed abroad in the heart, or of a season of refreshment from His presence. By such expressions as these, the Scripture intimates that "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" a description of which those who have tasted it will not require, and those who are strangers to it could not understand. This joy is not always the companion of faith, not even of strong faith; but it is that which a believer, whether rich or poor, incessantly thirsts after; and, in comparison whereof, all worldly good is but vanity and disappointment. The Lord imparts this joy to his people, in season and measure, as he sees fit; but his poor people have the largest share.

They have little comfort from the world, therefore he is pleased to be their comforter. They have many trials and sufferings; and he with whom they have to do knows their situation and pressures: he has promised to make their strength equal to their day, and to revive their fainting spirits with heavenly cordials. When it is thus with them, they can say, with Jacob, "I have enough;" or, as it is in the original, "I have all." This makes hard things easy, and the burden light, which the flesh would otherwise complain of as heavy. This has often given a sweeter relish to bread and water, than the

sensualist ever found in the most lavish and expensive refinements of luxury. Blessed are the poor who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love him. They often enjoy the most lively foretastes of the glory which shall be revealed.

Have not you, my friend, found these things true in your own experience? Yes! the Lord has sanctified your crosses, and supported you under them. Hitherto he has helped you, and he will be with you to the end. As you have followed him upon earth, you will before long follow him to heaven. You are now called to "sow in tears, there you shall reap in joy, and God shall wipe all tears from your eyes." In the mean time, be thankful that he honors you, in appointing you to be a witness for the truth and power of his grace, in the midst of an unbelieving world.

It is true, that even where the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. You have sharp trials, which, for the present, cannot be joyous, but grievous; and you have, doubtless, felt the depravity of your nature, and the subtlety of Satan, at some times prompting you to impatience, envy, and distrust. But these evils are not peculiar to a state of poverty; you would have been exposed to the same had you lived in affluence—along with many others, from which you are now exempted: for riches and poverty are but comparative terms, and it is only the grace of God can teach us to be content in any possible situation of life. The rich are as prone to desire something which they have not, as the poor; and those who have most to lose, have most to fear. That a man's life (the happiness of his life) "consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses," is an aphorism founded upon the highest authority, and confirmed by universal experience and observation.

In a word, you are not poor, but rich. The promises are your inheritance; heaven is your home; the angels of the Lord are ministering spirits, who rejoice to watch over you for good; and the Lord of angels himself is your sun and shield, and everlasting portion. It is impossible that you, to whom he has given Himself, his Son, his Spirit, his grace, his kingdom, can lack anything which is truly good for you. If riches were so, he could pour them upon you in abundance, as easily as he provides you your daily bread. But these, for the most part, he bestows on those who have no portion but in the present life. You have great reason to rejoice in the lot he has appointed for you, which secures you from numberless imaginary needs and real dangers, and furnishes you with the fairest opportunities for the manifestation, exercise, and increase of the graces he has implanted in you. Influenced by these views, I trust you can cheerfully say,

What others value, I resign:

Lord, 'tis enough that you are mine.

I commend you to the blessing of our covenant God, and to Jesus our Savior, "who, when He was rich, made himself poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might be rich."

Divine Guidance

Question: In what manner are we to expect the Lord's promised guidance to influence our judgments, and direct our steps in the path of duty?

Dear Sir,

It is well for those who are duly sensible of their own weakness and fallibility, and of the difficulties with which they are surrounded in life, that the Lord has promised to guide his people with his eye, and to cause them to hear a word behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when they are in danger of turning aside either to the right hand or to the left. For this purpose, he has given us the written word to be a lamp to our feet, and encouraged us to pray for the teaching of his Holy Spirit, that we may rightly understand and apply it. It is, however, too often seen, that many widely deviate from the path of duty, and commit gross and perplexing mistakes, while they profess a sincere desire to know the will of God, and think they have His warrant and authority. This must certainly be owing to misapplication of the rule by which they judge, since the rule itself is infallible, and the promise sure. The Scripture cannot deceive us, if rightly understood; but it may, if perverted, prove the occasion of confirming us in a mistake. The Holy Spirit cannot mislead those who are under his influence; but we may suppose that we are so, when we are not. It may not be unseasonable to offer a few thoughts upon a subject of great importance to the peace of our minds, and to the honor of our holy profession.

Many have been deceived as to what they ought to do, or in forming a judgment beforehand of events in which they are nearly concerned, by expecting direction in ways which the Lord has not warranted. I shall mention some of the principal of these, for it is not easy to enumerate them all.

Some people, when two or more things have been in view, and they could not immediately determine which to prefer, have committed their case to the Lord by prayer, and have then proceeded to **cast lots**: taking it for granted, that, after such a solemn appeal, the

turning up of the lot might be safely rested in as an answer from God. It is true, the Scripture, and indeed right reason, assures us, that the Lord disposes the lot; and there are several cases recorded in the Old Testament, in which lots were used by Divine appointment; but I think neither these, nor the choosing Matthias by lot to the apostleship, are proper precedents for our conduct. In the division of the lands of Canaan, in the affair of Achan, and in the nomination of Saul to the kingdom, recourse was had to lots by God's express command. The instance of Matthias likewise was singular, such as can never happen again; namely, the choice of an apostle; who would not have been upon a par with the rest, who were chosen immediately by the Lord, unless He had been pleased to interpose in some extraordinary way; and all these were before the canon of Scripture was completed, and before the full descent and communication of the Holy Spirit, who was promised to dwell with the church to the end of time.

Under the New Testament dispensation, we are invited to come boldly to the Throne of Grace, to make our requests known to the Lord, and to cast our cares upon him: but we have neither precept nor promise respecting the use of lots; and to have recourse to them without his appointment, seems to be tempting him rather than honoring him, and to savor more of presumption than dependence. The effects likewise of this expedient have often been unhappy and hurtful: a sufficient proof how little it is to be trusted to as a guide of our conduct.

Others, when in doubt, have **opened the Bible at a venture**, and expected to find something to direct them in the first verse they should cast their eye upon. It is no small discredit to this practice, that the Heathens, who knew not the Bible, used some of their favorite books in the same way; and grounded their persuasions of

what they ought to do, or of what should befall them, according to the passage they happened to open upon. Among the Romans, the writings of Virgil were frequently consulted upon these occasions. And indeed Virgil is as well adapted to satisfy inquirers in this way as the Bible itself; for if people will be governed by the occurrence of a single text of Scripture, without regarding the context, or duly comparing it with the general tenor of the word of God, and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagances, expect the greatest impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, while they think they have the word of God on their side.

Can the opening upon 2Sa. 7:3, when Nathan said unto David, "Do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you," be sufficient to determine the lawfulness or expediency of actions? Or can a glance of the eye upon our Lord's words to the woman of Canaan, Mat. 15:28, "Be it unto you even as you will," amount to a proof, that the present earnest desire of the mind (whatever it may be) shall be surely accomplished? Yet it is certain that matters big with important consequences have been engaged in, and the most optimistic expectations formed, upon no better warrant than dipping (as it is called) upon a text of Scripture.

A sudden strong impression of a text, that seems to have some resemblance to the concern upon the mind, has been accepted by many as an infallible token that they were right, and that things would go just as they would have them: or, on the other hand, if the passage bore a threatening aspect, it has filled them with fears and disquietudes, which they have afterwards found were groundless and unnecessary. These impressions, being more out of their power than the former method, have been more generally regarded and trusted to, but have frequently proved no less delusive.

It is allowed, that such impressions of a precept or a promise as humble, animate, or comfort the soul, by giving it a lively sense of the truth contained in the words, are both profitable and pleasant; and many of the Lord's people have been instructed and supported (especially in a time of trouble) by some seasonable word of grace applied and sealed by his Spirit with power to their hearts. But if impressions or impulses are received as a voice from heaven, directing to such particular actions as could not be proved to be duties without them, a person may be unwarily misled into great evils and gross delusions; and many have been so. There is no doubt but the enemy of our souls, if permitted, can furnish us with Scriptures in abundance in this way, and for these purposes.

Some people judge of the nature and event of their designs, by **the freedom which they find in prayer**. They say they commit their ways to God, seek his direction, and are favored with much enlargement of spirit; and therefore they cannot doubt but what they have in view is acceptable in the Lord's sight. I would not absolutely reject every plea of this kind, yet, without other corroborating evidence, I could not admit it in proof of what it is brought for. It is not always easy to determine when we have spiritual freedom in prayer. Self is deceitful; and when our hearts are much fixed and bent upon a thing, this may put words and earnestness into our mouths. Too often we first secretly determine for ourselves, and then come to ask counsel of God; in such a disposition we are ready to catch at everything that may seem to favor our darling scheme; and the Lord, for the detection and chastisement of our hypocrisy (for hypocrisy it is, though perhaps hardly perceptible to ourselves), may answer us according to our idols; see Eze. 14:3-4.

Besides, the grace of prayer may be in exercise, when the subject-matter of the prayer may be founded upon a mistake, from the

intervention of circumstances which we are unacquainted with. Thus, I may have a friend in a distant country; I hope he is alive; I pray for him, and it is my duty so to do. The Lord, by his Spirit, assists his people in what is their present duty. If I am enabled to pray with much liberty for my distant friend, it may be a proof that the Spirit of the Lord is pleased to assist my infirmities, but it is no proof that my friend is certainly alive at the time I am praying for him: and if the next time I pray for him I should find my spirit straitened, I am not to conclude that my friend is dead, and therefore the Lord will not assist me in praying for him any longer.

Once more: A **remarkable dream** has sometimes been thought as decisive as any of the foregoing methods of knowing the will of God. That many wholesome and seasonable admonitions have been received in dreams, I willingly allow; but, though they may be occasionally noticed, to pay a great attention to dreams, especially to be guided by them, to form our sentiments, conduct, or expectations upon them—is superstitious and dangerous. The promises are not made to those who dream, but to those who watch.

Upon the whole, though the Lord may give to some people, upon some occasions, a hint or encouragement out of the common way; yet expressly to look for and seek his direction in such things as I have mentioned, is unscriptural and ensnaring. I could fill many sheets with a detail of the inconveniences and evils which have followed such a dependence, within the course of my own observation. I have seen some presuming they were doing God service, while acting in contradiction to his express commands. I have known others infatuated to believe a lie, declaring themselves assured, beyond the shadow of a doubt, of things which, after all, never came to pass; and when at length disappointed, Satan has improved the occasion to make them doubt of the plainest and most

important truths, and to account their whole former experience a delusion. By these things weak believers have been stumbled, cavils and offenses against the Gospel multiplied, and the ways of truth evil spoken of.

But how then may the Lord's guidance be expected? After what has been premised negatively, the question may be answered in a few words. In general, God guides and directs His people, by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of his Holy Spirit, who enables them to understand and to love the Scriptures. The word of God furnishes us with just principles, and right apprehensions, to regulate our judgments and affections, and thereby to influence and direct our conduct. Those who study the Scriptures, in a humble dependence upon Divine teaching, are taught to make a true estimate of everything around them, and are gradually formed into a spirit of submission to the will of God. They thereby discover the nature and duties of their several situations and relations in life, and the snares and temptations to which they are exposed.

The word of God dwelling richly in them, is a preservative from error, a light to their feet, and a spring of strength and consolation. By treasuring up the doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of Scripture, in their minds, and daily comparing themselves with the rule by which they walk, they grow into a habitual frame of spiritual wisdom, and acquire a gracious taste, which enables them to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty, as a musical ear judges of sounds. And they are seldom mistaken, because they are influenced by the love of Christ, which rules in their hearts, and a regard to the glory of God, which is the great object they have in view.

In particular cases, the Lord opens and shuts for them, breaks down walls of difficulty which obstruct their path, or hedges up their way with thorns, when they are in danger of going wrong, by the dispensations of his providence. They know that their concerns are in his hands; they are willing to follow where and when he leads; but are afraid of going before him. Therefore they are not impatient: because they believe, they will not make haste, but wait daily upon him in prayer; especially when they find their hearts most engaged in any purpose or pursuit, they are most watchful of being deceived by appearances, and dare not move farther or faster than they can perceive his light shining upon their paths. I express at least their desire, if not their attainment: thus they would be. And though there are seasons when faith languishes, and self too much prevails, this is their general disposition; and the Lord, whom they serve, does not disappoint their expectations. He leads them by a right way, preserves them from a thousand snares, and satisfies them that he is and will be their guide even unto death.

Desires Unrealized

by John Newton, 1772

"You cannot do the things that you would." (Gal. 5:17)

This is an humbling, but a just account of a Christian's attainments in the present life, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less, the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given His people a desire and will aiming at great things: without this they would be unworthy the name of Christians; but they cannot do as they would. Their best desires are weak and ineffectual, not absolutely so (for He who works

in them to will, enables then *in a measure to do* likewise), but in comparison with the mark at which they aim. So that while they have great cause to be thankful for the desire He has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered, they have equal reason to be ashamed and abased under a sense of their continual defects, and the evil mixtures which taint and debase their best endeavors.

It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars which a believer would do if he could, but in which, from first to last, he finds a mortifying inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

1. He would willingly enjoy God in **prayer**. He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in his judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honor and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in Heaven, that He should stoop so much lower, to afford His gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth. He can bid them expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind, and greater in degree, than all that the world can afford. By prayer, he can say, 'You have liberty to cast all your cares upon Him that cares for you. By one hour's intimate access to the Throne of Grace, where the Lord causes His glory to pass before the soul that seeks Him, you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort than by a day or week's converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many folios'--and in this light he would consider it and improve it for himself.

But, alas! how seldom can he do as he would. How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad of a just excuse to omit! And the chief pleasure he derives from the performance is to

think that his task is finished: he has been drawing near to God with his lips, while his heart was far from Him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when (to borrow the expression of an old woman here) he is dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief.

2. The like may be said of reading the **Scriptures**. He believes them to be the Word of God; he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Yet while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day, he cannot do as he would. It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged than when reading a pamphlet. Here again his privilege frequently dwindles into a task. His appetite is vitiated, so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

3. He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the Person and love of the Lord **Jesus Christ**. Glad is he, indeed, of those occasions which recall the Savior to his mind; and with this view notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would. Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow creatures, he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting out of our thoughts, of whom we say, He is the Beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave Himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion. What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could we would set Him always before us; His love should be the delightful theme of our hearts.

"From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve." But though we aim at this good, evil is present with us; we find we are renewed but in part, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, to take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.

4. He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of Divine **providence**. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God and the good of those who fear Him. He doubts not but the hairs of his head are all numbered—that the blessings of every kind which he possesses were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him by the bounty and special favor of the Lord whom he serves; that afflictions spring not out of the ground, but are fruits and tokens of Divine love, no less than his comforts—that there is a needs-be, whenever for a season he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt of what he sees with his eyes, and there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often when he aims to apply them in an hour of present distress, he cannot do what he would. He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not, he is ready to complain, mummer, and despond.

Alas! How vain is man in his best estate! How much weakness and inconsistency, even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! And what reason have we to confess that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants! It were easy to enlarge in this way, would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God--we are not under the law, but under grace: and even these distressing effects of the remnants of indwelling sin are overruled for good. By these experiences the believer is weaned from self, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely to rely on Him, who is appointed unto

us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. **The more vile we are in our own eyes--the more precious will Jesus be to us.** A deep repeated sense of the evil of our hearts is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation where it is due. Again, a sense of these evils will, when hardly anything else can do it, reconcile us to the thoughts of death, yes make us desirous to depart that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep rooted in our nature, that, like the leprous house, the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement. Then, and not until then, we shall be able to do the thing that we would: when we see Jesus we shall be transformed into His image, and have done with sin and sorrow forever!

Causes, nature, and marks of a decline in grace

March, 1765

My friend,

I remember, when I once had the pleasure of waiting on you, you were pleased to begin an interesting conversation, which, to my concern, was interrupted. The subject was concerning the **causes, nature, and marks of a decline in grace**; how it happens that we lose that warm impression of Divine things, which in some favored moments we think it almost impossible to forget; how far this change of frame is consistent with a *spiritual growth* in other respects; how to form a comparative judgment of our proficiency upon the whole; and by what steps the losses we sustain from our necessary connection with a sinful nature and a sinful world, may be retrieved from time to time. I beg your permission to fill up the paper with a view to these inquiries. I do not mean to offer a labored essay on them—but such thoughts as shall occur while the pen is in my hand.

The awakened soul (especially when, after a season of distress and terror, it begins to taste that the Lord is gracious) finds itself as in a new world. No change in outward life can be so sensible so affecting. No wonder, then, that at such a time little else can be thought of—the transition from darkness—to light; from a sense of wrath—to a hope of glory, is the greatest change which can be imagined, and is oftentimes as *sudden* as *wonderful*. Hence the general characteristics of young converts are *zeal* and *love*. Like Israel at the Red Sea, they have just seen the wonderful works of the Lord, and

they cannot but sing his praise; they are deeply affected with the *danger* they have lately escaped, and with the case of multitudes around them, who are secure and careless in the same alarming situation; and a sense of their own mercies, and a compassion for the souls of others, is so transporting, that they can hardly forbear preaching to everyone they meet.

This emotion is highly just and reasonable, with respect to the causes from whence it springs; and it is doubtless a proof, not only of the imperfection—but the depravity of our nature, that we are not always thus affected; yet it is not entirely genuine. If we examine this character closely, which seems at first sight, a pattern and a reproof to Christians of longer standing, we shall for the most part find it attended with considerable **defects**.

1. Such people are very weak in faith. Their confidence arises rather from the lively impressions of joy within—than from a distinct and clear apprehension of the work of God in Christ. The comforts which are intended as cordials to animate them against the opposition of an unbelieving world—they mistake and rest in as the proper evidences of their hope. And hence it comes to pass, that when the Lord varies his dispensations, and hides his face—they are soon troubled and at their wit's end.

2. Those who are in this state of their first love, are seldom free from something of a censorious spirit. They have not yet felt all the deceitfulness of their own hearts; they are not well acquainted with the devices or temptations of Satan; and therefore know not how to sympathize or make allowances with others, where allowances are necessary and due—and can hardly bear with any who do not reveal the same earnestness as themselves.

3. They are likewise more or less under the influence of self-righteousness and self-will. They mean well—but not being as yet well acquainted with the spiritual meaning and proper use of the law, nor established in the life of faith, a part (oftentimes a very considerable part) of their zeal spends itself in *externals* and *non-essentials*, prompts them to practice what is not commanded, to refrain from what is lawful, and to observe various and needless austerities and singularities, as their tempers and circumstances differ.

However, with all their faults, methinks there is something very beautiful and engaging in the honest vehemence of a young convert. Some cold and rigid judges are ready to reject these promising appearances on account of *incidental blemishes*. But would a gardener throw away a fine nectarine, because it is green, and has not yet attained all that beauty and flavor which a few more showers and suns will impart? Perhaps it will hold for the most part in *grace* as in *nature* (some exceptions there are) —if there is not some *fire* in youth, we can hardly expect a proper *warmth* in old age.

But the great and good Gardener watches over what his own hand has planted, and carries on his work by a variety of *different*, and even *contrary* dispensations. While their mountain stands thus strong, they think they shall never be moved; but at length they find a change. Sometimes it comes on by insensible degrees. That part of their affection which was purely natural, will abate of course when the *power of novelty* ceases. They will begin, in some instances, to perceive their own indiscretions; and an endeavor to correct the excesses of an *imprudent zeal* will often draw them towards the contrary extreme of *remissness*. The *evils of their hearts*, which, though overpowered, were *not eradicated*, will revive again. The enemy will watch his occasions to meet them with suitable

temptations; and as it is the Lord's design that they should *experimentally learn and feel their own weakness*, he will in some instances be permitted to succeed.

When guilt is thus brought upon the conscience, the heart grows hard, the hands feeble, and the knees weak; then confidence is shaken, the spirit of prayer interrupted, the armor gone. And thus things grow worse and worse—until the Lord is pleased to interpose. For though we can fall of ourselves, we cannot rise without his help! Indeed, every sin, in its own nature, has a tendency towards a final apostasy! But there is a provision in the covenant of grace, and the Lord, in his own time, returns to convince, humble, pardon, comfort, and renew the soul. He touches the rock—and the waters flow. By repeated experiments and exercises of this sort (for this wisdom is seldom acquired by one or a few lessons), we begin at length to learn that we *are* nothing, *have* nothing, *can do* nothing—but sin. And thus we are gradually prepared to live more outside of ourselves—and to derive all our sufficiency of every kind from Jesus, the fountain of grace. We learn to tread more warily, to trust less to our own strength; to have lower thoughts of ourselves, and higher thoughts of Jesus! In which two last particulars, I apprehend what the Scripture means by a growth of grace does properly consist. Both are increasing in the lively Christian—every day shows him more of his own heart, and more of the power, sufficiency, compassion, and grace of his adorable Redeemer; but neither will be complete until we get to heaven.

I apprehend, therefore, that though we find an abatement of that sensible warmth of affection which we felt at first setting out; yet, if our views are more evangelical, our judgment more ripened, our hearts more habitually humbled under a sense of inward depravity, our tempers more softened into sympathy and tenderness; if our

prevailing desires are spiritual, and we practically esteem the precepts, ordinances, and people of God; we may warrantably conclude, that his good work of grace in us is, upon the whole, on an increase.

But still it is to be lamented, that an increase of knowledge and experience, should be so generally attended with a decline of fervor. If this was not for what has passed in my own heart, I would be ready to think it impossible. But this very circumstance gives me a still more emphatic conviction of my own vileness and depravity. The lack of humiliation humbles me, and my very indifference rouses and awakens me to earnestness.

There are, however, seasons of refreshment, ineffable glances of light and power upon the soul—which, as they are derived from clearer displays of Divine grace, if not so elevating as the first joys, are more penetrating, transforming, and animating. A glance of these, when compared with our sluggish stupidity when they are withheld—weans the heart from this wretched state of sin and temptation, and makes the thoughts of death and eternity desirable. Then this *conflict* shall cease; I shall sin and wander no more, see him as he is, and be like him forever!

If the question is—How are these bright moments to be prolonged, renewed, or retrieved? We are directed to faith and diligence. A careful use of the appointed means of grace, a watchful endeavor to avoid the occasions and appearances of evil, and especially assiduity in secret prayer, will bring us as much of them as the Lord sees good for us. He knows best—why we are not to be trusted with them continually. Here we are to walk by faith, to be exercised and tried; by and by we shall be crowned, and the desires he has given shall be abundantly satisfied!

Difference Between Acquired and Experimental Knowledge

April, 1766

My friend,

I shall embrace your permission to fill my paper. As to the *subject*, that which has been a frequent theme of my heart of late—I shall venture to lay before you; I mean, the **remarkable and humbling difference** which I suppose all who know themselves may observe, between their ***acquired*** and their ***experimental*** knowledge. In other words, the difference between their *judgment* and their *practice*. To hear a believer speak his apprehensions of the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the love of Christ, the beauty of holiness, or the importance of eternity—who would not suppose him to be armored against temptation? To hear with what strong arguments he can recommend watchfulness, prayer, forbearance, and submission, when he is teaching or advising others—who would not suppose but he could also teach himself, and influence his own conduct! Yet, alas! The person who rose from his knees before he left his chamber—as a poor, indigent, fallible, dependent creature, who saw and acknowledged that he was unworthy to breathe the air or too see the light—may meet with many occasions, before the day is closed, to discover the *corruptions of his heart*, and to manifest how weak and faint his *best principles* and *clearest convictions* are, in their actual exercise!

And in this view—how vain is man! what a *contradiction* is a believer to himself! He is called a *Believer* emphatically, because he cordially

assents to the Word of God; but, alas! how often unworthy of the name!

If I were to describe him from the **Scriptural portrait**—I would say that he is one whose heart is athirst for God, for His glory, and for His presence; that his affections are fixed upon an unseen Savior; that his treasures, and consequently his thoughts, are on eternal realities, far beyond the bounds of sense. Having experienced much God's forgiveness, he is full of mercy and forgiveness to all around. Having been often deceived by his own heart, he dares trust it no more—but lives by faith in the Son of God, for wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and derives from Him grace upon grace; sensible that without Him he has not sufficiency even to think a good thought! In short—he is dead to the world, to sin, to self; but alive to God, and lively in His service. Prayer is his breath, the Word of God his food, and the ordinances more precious to him than the light of the sun. Such is a believer—in his judgment and prevailing desires.

But was I to describe him from his **actual experience**, especially at some times—how different would the picture be! Though he knows that communion with God is his highest privilege, he too seldom finds it so; on the contrary, if duty, conscience, and necessity did not compel him—he would leave the throne of grace unvisited from day to day! He takes up the Bible, conscious that it is the fountain of life and true comfort; yet perhaps, while he is making the reflection, he feels a secret distaste, which prompts him to lay it down, and give his preference to a newspaper! He needs not to be told of the vanity and uncertainty of the world, and all beneath the sun; and yet is almost as much elated or cast down by a trifle—as those who have their only portion in this world! He believes that all things shall work together for his good, and that the most high God appoints, adjusts, and

overrules all his concerns; yet he feels the risings of fear, anxiety, and displeasure, as though the contrary was true! He owns himself to be ignorant, and liable to be deceived by a thousand fallacies; yet he is easily betrayed into flattering views of himself, and self-conceit! He feels himself to be an unprofitable, unfaithful, unthankful servant, and therefore blushes to harbor a thought of desiring the esteem and commendations of men—yet he cannot suppress it! Finally (for I must observe some bounds), on account of these and many other inconsistencies, he is struck dumb before the Lord, stripped of every hope and plea, but what is provided in the free grace of God—and yet his heart is continually leaning and returning to a covenant of works.

Two questions naturally arise from such a view of ourselves.

First: How can these things be—or why are they permitted? Since the Lord hates sin, teaches his people to hate it and cry against it, and has promised to hear their prayers—how is it that they go thus burdened by sin? Surely, if he could not, or would not, over-rule evil for good—he would not permit it to continue. By these exercises of sin and grace, the Lord teaches us more truly to know and feel the utter depravity and corruption of our whole nature, that we are indeed defiled in every part! His *method of salvation* is likewise hereby exceedingly endeared to us! We see that it is and must be of grace, wholly of grace; and that the Lord Jesus Christ, and his perfect righteousness, is and must be our all in all.

God's *power* likewise, in maintaining his own work notwithstanding our infirmities, temptations, and enemies, is hereby displayed in the clearest light; his strength is manifested in our weakness!

Satan likewise is more remarkably disappointed and put to shame, when he finds bounds set to his rage and wiles, beyond which he cannot pass; and that those in whom he finds so much evil to work

upon, and over whom he so often prevails for a season—escape at last out of his hands! He casts them down—but they are raised again! He wounds them—but they are healed! He obtains his desire to sift them as wheat—but the prayer of their great Advocate prevails for the maintenance of their faith.

Farther, by what believers feel in themselves—they learn by degrees how to warn, pity, and bear with others. A soft, patient, and compassionate spirit, and a readiness and skill in comforting those who are cast down, is not perhaps attainable in any other way.

And, lastly, I believe that nothing more habitually reconciles a child of God to the thought of death, than the wearisomeness of this warfare with sin and temptation. Death is unwelcome to human nature. But the Christian knows that not until death—will conflict cease! Then we shall sin no more. The flesh, with all its attendant evils, will be laid in the grave. Then the soul, which has been partaker of a new and heavenly birth, shall be freed from every encumbrance, and stand perfect in the Redeemer's righteousness before God in eternal glory!

But though these evils cannot be wholly removed, it is worth while to inquire, Secondly, *How they may be mitigated?* This we are encouraged to hope for. The Word of God directs and animates to a growth in grace—and though we can do nothing spiritually of ourselves—yet there is a part assigned us. We cannot *conquer* the obstacles in our way by our own strength; yet we *can give way* to them; and if we do, it is our *sin*—and will be our *sorrow*.

The disputes concerning *inherent power in the creature*, have been carried to inconvenient lengths; for my own part, I think it safe to use Scriptural language. The Apostles exhort us to give all diligence—to resist the devil; to purge ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and

spirit; to give ourselves to reading, meditation, and prayer; to watch; to put on the whole armor of God; and to abstain from all appearance of evil. Faithfulness to light received, and a *sincere endeavor* to conform to the means prescribed in the Word of God, with a humble application to the Blood of sprinkling and the promised Holy Spirit, will undoubtedly be answered by increasing measures of light, faith, strength, and comfort. We shall know—if we follow on to know the Lord.

How to Walk with God

March, 1773

Dear sir,

A simple dependence upon the teaching and influence of the good Spirit of God, so as not to supersede the use of appointed means, would, if it could be uniformly maintained, make every part of duty easy and successful. It would free us from much solicitude, and prevent many mistakes. Methinks I have a subject in view already, a subject of great importance to myself, and which perhaps will not be displeasing to you—**How to walk with God in the daily occurrences of life, so as to do everything for his sake and by his strength.**

When we are justified by faith, and accepted in the Beloved—we become heirs of everlasting life; but we cannot know the full value of our privileges, until we enter upon the state of eternal glory. For this, most who are converted have to wait some time after they are

partakers of grace. Though the Lord loves them, hates sin, and teaches them to hate it—he appoints them to remain a while in a sinful world, and to groan under the burden of a depraved nature. He could put them in immediate possession of the heaven for which he has given them a fitness—but he does not. He has a service for them here; an honor which is worth all they can suffer, and for which eternity will not afford an opportunity, namely—to be instruments of promoting his designs, and manifesting his grace in the world. Strictly speaking, this is the whole of our business here, the only reason why life is prolonged, or for which it is truly desirable, that we may fill up our connections and situations, improve our comforts and our crosses, in such a manner as that God may be glorified in us and by us.

As he is a bountiful Master and a kind Father, he is pleased to afford a variety of *temporal blessings*, which sweeten our service, and as coming from his hand are very valuable. But they are by no means worth living for, considered in themselves, as they can neither satisfy our desires, preserve us from trouble, or support us under it. That light of God's countenance, which can pervade the walls and dissipate the gloom of a dungeon, is unspeakably preferable to all that can be enjoyed in a palace without it. The true end of life is, to live not to ourselves—but to Him who died for us; and while we devote ourselves to his service upon earth, to rejoice in the prospect of being happy with him forever in heaven.

These things are generally known and acknowledged by professors; but they are a favored few who *act consistently* with their avowed principles; who honestly, diligently, and without reserve, endeavor to make the most of their talents and strength in promoting the Lord's service, and allow themselves in no views or designs but what are plainly subordinate and subservient to it. Yes, I believe the best of

the Lord's servants see cause enough to confess, that they are not only *unprofitable* in comparison of what they wish to be—but in many instances *unfaithful* likewise. They find so many snares, hindrances, and temptations, arising from without, and so much encumbrance from sin which dwells within—that they have more cause for humiliation than self-complacence, even when they seem most earnest and most useful.

However, we have no Scriptural evidence that we serve the Lord at all, any farther than we find a habitual desire and aim to serve him *wholly*. He is gracious to our imperfections and weakness; yet he requires *all the heart*, and will not be served by halves, nor accept what is performed by a divided heart.

Doing all to the glory of God, is the true alchemy which turns everything to gold, and ennobles the common actions of life into acts of piety; 1 Cor. 10:31. Nor is there a grain of real goodness in the most specious actions, which are performed without a reference to God's glory. This the world cannot understand; but it will appear highly reasonable to those who take their ideas of God from the Scripture, and who have felt the necessity and found the benefits of redemption.

We are debtors many ways—the Lord has a right to us by *creation*, by *redemption*, by *conquest*, when he freed us from Satan's power, and took possession of our hearts by his grace; and, lastly, by our own voluntary *surrender*, in the day when he enabled us to fix our choice on himself—as our Lord and our portion. Then we felt the force of our obligations. We saw the beauty and honor of his service, and that nothing was worthy to stand in the least degree of competition with it. This is always equally true, though our perceptions of it are not always equally strong. But where it has been once really known, it

cannot be wholly forgotten, or cease to be the governing principle of life; and the Lord has promised to revive the impression in those who wait upon him, and thereby to renew their strength; for in proportion as we feel by what ties we are his—we shall embrace his service as perfect freedom.

Again—when the *eye* is thus single, the whole body will be full of light. The principle of acting simply for God, will in general make the path of duty plain, solve a thousand otherwise dubious questions, lead to the most proper and obvious means, and preclude that painful anxiety about events, which upon no other plan can be avoided. The love of God is the best casuist; especially as it leads us to a careful attendance to his precepts, a reliance on his promises, and a submission to his will.

Most of our perplexities arise from an undue, though perhaps unperceived, attachment to SELF. Either we have some scheme of our own too closely connected with our general view of serving the Lord; or lay some stress upon our own management, which, though we suspect it may possibly fail us, we cannot entirely help trusting to. In these respects the Lord permits his servants occasionally to feel their own weakness; but if they are sincerely devoted to him, he will teach them to profit by it, and bring them by degrees to a simplicity of dependence, as well as of intention. Then all things are easy. Acting from love, and walking by faith, they can neither be *disappointed* or *discouraged*. Duty is their part, care is his, and they are enabled to cast it upon him. They know, that, when their *expedients* seem to fail—that he is still all-sufficient. They know, that, being engaged in his cause, they cannot miscarry; and that, though in some things they may seem to fall short of success, they are sure of meeting acceptance, and that he will estimate their services not by

their actual effects—but according to the gracious *principle* and *desire* he has put into their hearts. 2 Chron. 6:7-8.

By the Grace of God I Am what I Am!

June, 1773

Dear sir,

I must content myself with the idea of the pleasure it would give me, to sit with you half a day under my favorite great tree, and converse with you, not concerning the comparatively petty affairs of human governments—but of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. How many delightful subjects would suggest themselves in a free and retired conversation! The excellency of our King, the permanency and glory of his kingdom, the beauty of his administration, the privileges of his subjects, the review of what he has done for us, and the prospect of what he has prepared for us in future—and if, while we were conversing, he should be pleased to join us (as he did the disciples when walking to Emmaus), how would our hearts burn within us! Indeed, whether we are alone or in company, the most interesting topics strike us but *faintly*—unless he is pleased to afford his gracious influence; but when he is present—light, love, liberty, and joy, spring up in the hearts that know him.

But we cannot meet. All that is left for me, is to use the liberty you allow me of offering a few hints upon these subjects by letter, not because you don't know them—but because you love them. The hour is coming, when all *impediments* shall be removed—all distinctions shall cease that are founded upon sublunary things, and the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. Glorious day! May our souls be

filled with the thought, and learn to estimate all things around us now—by the view in which they will appear to us then. Then it will be of small consequence who was the prince, and who was the beggar, in this life; but who in their several situations sought, and loved, and feared, and honored the Lord.

Alas! how many of the kings of the earth, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, will then say (in vain) to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!" In this world they are for the most part too *busy* to regard the commands of God, or too *amusing* to seek his favor. They have their good things here; they please themselves for a while, and in a moment they go down to the grave. In that moment their thoughts perish, their schemes are left unfinished, they are torn from their possessions, and enter upon a new, an untried, an unchangeable, a never-ending state of existence! Alas, is this all the world can afford!

I congratulate you—not because God has appointed you to appear in an elevated rank, (this, abstracted from the opportunity it affords you of greater gospel usefulness, would perhaps be a more proper subject for condolence); but that he has admitted you to those honors and privileges which come from him alone, and which so few in the superior ranks of life think worthy of their attention. "**By the grace of God I am what I am!**" 1 Corinthians 15:10.

As believers, we are often affected with a sense of God's *distinguishing mercy* to us. We are debtors, great debtors to the sovereign grace of God, which alone makes us to differ from the perishing world around us!

Yet it does not yet appear *what we shall be*. We cannot form a just

conception of *the misery from which we are redeemed*, much less of *the price paid for our redemption!* How little do we know of the Redeemer's surpassing excellency, and of the unutterable agonies He endured, when His soul was made an offering for sin, and it pleased the Father to bruise Him—that by His stripes we might be healed! These things will strike us in quite another manner—when we view them from the light of eternity!

May the cheering contemplation of the glorious hope set before us—support and animate us to improve our short interval on earth, and fill us with a holy ambition of shining as lights in this evil world, to the praise and glory of His grace—who has called us out of darkness, into His glorious light!

Encompassed as we are with snares, temptations, and infirmities, it is possible (by His promised assistance) to live in some good measure *above the world*—above the influence of its *cares*, its *smiles*, or its *frowns*. Our citizenship is in heaven—we are not at home—but only reside here on earth for a season, to fulfill our appointed service. The Lord, whom we serve, has promised that He will *guide* us by His wisdom, *strengthen* us by His power, and *comfort* us with the light of His countenance, which is better than life. Every temporal blessing we receive from Him, is a token of His favor, and a pledge of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which He has reserved for us in heaven. Oh! to hear Him say at last, "*Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord!*" will be rich amends for all that we can lose, suffer, or endure, for His sake!

"No *eye* has seen, no *ear* has heard, and no *mind* has imagined—what God has prepared for those who love Him!" 1 Corinthians 2:9

Separated from the Ungodly World

May 24, 1774

Dear sir,

What a mercy it is, to be separated in spirit, conversation, and interest—from the ungodly world! Where all are alike by nature—but grace makes a happy and unspeakable difference! Believers were once under the same influence of that evil spirit who still works in the children of disobedience; each pursuing different paths—but all equally remote from truth and peace; some hatching cockatrice eggs, others weaving spiders' webs. These two general heads, of *evil* and *vanity*, include all the schemes, aims, and achievements of which man is capable—until God is pleased to visit the heart with his grace.

The busy part of mankind are employed in multiplying evils and miseries. The more retired, speculative, and curious, are amusing themselves with what will hereafter appear as unsubstantial, unstable, and useless, as a cobweb! Death will soon sweep away all which the philosophers, the scientists, the mathematicians, the antiquarians, and other *learned triflers*, are now weaving with so much self-applauded address. Nor will the fine-spun dresses, in which the moralist and the self-righteous clothe themselves, be of more advantage to them, either for ornament or defense, than the web of a spider.

It is given only to a few, to know their present state and future destination. These build upon the immovable *Rock of ages* for

eternity. These are trees springing from a living root, and bear the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. These alone are awake, while the rest of the world are in a deep sleep, indulging in vain dreams; from which likewise they will shortly awake. But, O with what consternation, when they shall find themselves irrecoverably divorced from all their *delusive attachments*, and compelled to appear before that God to whom they have lived strangers, and to whom they must give an account! O for a thousand tongues, to proclaim in the ears of thoughtless mortals, that important aphorism of our Lord, "Only one thing is needful!" Yet a thousand tongues would be, and are, employed in vain—unless so far as the Lord is pleased to send the watchman's warning, by the power and agency of his own Spirit.

I think the poet tells us, that Cassandra had the gift of truly foretelling future events; but she was afterwards laid under a painful embarrassment, that nobody would believe her words. Such, with respect to the bulk of their hearers, is the lot of Gospel ministers. They are enlightened to see, and sent forth to declare, the dreadful consequences of sin; but, alas, how few believe their report!

To illustrate our grief and disappointment, I sometimes suppose there was a dangerous river in the way of travelers, over which there is a bridge, which those who can be prevailed upon may pass with safety. By the side of this bridge watchmen are placed, to warn passengers of the danger of the waters; to assure them, that all who attempt to go through them inevitably perish; to invite, entreat, and beseech them, if they value their lives—to cross the bridge. Methinks this should be an easy task—yet if we should see, in fact, the greater part stopping their ears to the friendly importunity, many so much offended by it, as to account the watchman's care impertinent, and only deserving of scorn and ill-treatment, hardly one in fifty betaking

themselves to the friendly bridge, the rest eagerly plunging into the waters, from which none return, as if they were determined to see who would be drowned first—this spectacle would be no unfit emblem of the reception the Gospel meets with, from a blinded world.

Gospel ministers are rejected, opposed, vilified; they are accounted troublers of the world, because they dare not, cannot stand silent, while sinners are perishing before their eyes. And if, in the course of many sermons, they can prevail but on one soul to take timely warning, and to seek to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life—they may account it a mercy and an honor, sufficient to overbalance all the labor and reproaches they are called to endure. From the most, they must expect no better reception than the Jews gave to Jeremiah, who told the Prophet to his face, "As to the word you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord—we will not hearken to you at all; but we will certainly do whatever goes forth out of our own mouth!"

Surely, if the Lord has given us any sense of the worth of our souls, any compassion towards them, this must be a painful exercise; and experience must teach us something of the meaning of Jeremiah's pathetic exclamation, "O that my head were waters, and my eyes fountains of tears—that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people!" It is our duty to be thus affected.

Our relief lies in the *wisdom* and *sovereignty* of God. He reveals his salvation to whom he pleases, for the most part to babes; from the bulk of the wise and the prudent—the gospel is hidden. Thus it has pleased him—and therefore it must be right. Yes, he will one day condescend to justify the propriety and equity of his proceedings to his creatures; then every mouth will be stopped, and none will be

able to reply against their Judge. Light has come into the world—but men prefer darkness. They hate the light, resist it, and rebel against it. It is true—all do so! And therefore, if all were to perish under the condemnation, their ruin would be their own act. It is of *grace* that any are saved; and in the distribution of that grace, God does what he will with his own—a right which most are ready enough to claim in their own concerns, though they are so unwilling to allow it to the Lord of all.

Many perplexing and acrimonious *disputes* have been started upon this subject; but the redeemed of the Lord are called not to *dispute*—but to admire and rejoice, to love, adore, and obey! To know that he loved us, and gave himself for us, is the constraining argument and motive to love him, and surrender ourselves to him; to consider ourselves as no longer our own—but to devote ourselves, with every faculty, power, and talent, to his service and glory. He deserves our all—for he parted with all for us. He made himself poor, he endured shame, torture, death, and the curse, for us—that we, through him, might inherit everlasting life! Ah! the hardness of my heart, that I am no more affected, astonished, and overpowered, with this thought!

The History of Mankind

July, 1777

Dear sir,

I have recently read "*Robertson's History of Charles V*", which, like most other histories, I consider as a comment upon those passages of Scripture which teach us the depravity of man, the deceitfulness of the heart, the ruinous effects of sin; and the powerful, though secret,

rule of Divine Providence, moving, directing, controlling the designs and actions of men, with an unerring hand, to the accomplishment of his own purposes, both of mercy and judgment. Without the clue and the light which the Word of God affords—**the history of mankind**, of any, of every age, only presents to view—a labyrinth and a chaos; a detail of wickedness and misery to make us tremble; and a confused jumble of interfering incidents, as destitute of stability, connection, or order—as the clouds which fly over our heads.

But with *the Scripture key*—all is plain, all is instructive. Then I see, truly there is a God, who governs the earth, who pours contempt upon princes, takes the wise in their own craftiness, over-rules the wrath and pride of man to bring his own designs to pass, and restrains all that is not necessary to that end; blasting the best concerted enterprises at one time, by means apparently slight, and altogether unexpected, and at other times producing the most important events from instruments and circumstances which are at first thought too feeble and trivial to deserve notice.

I would like to see a writer of Dr. Robertson's abilities give us a history upon this plan; but I think his reflections of this sort are too general, too cold, and too few. What an empty phantom do the great men of the world pursue, while they wage war with the peace of mankind, and butcher (in the course of their lives) perhaps hundreds of thousands, to maintain the shadow of authority over distant nations, whom they can reach with no other influence than that of oppression and devastation! But when we consider those who are *sacrificed to their ambition* as justly suffering for their sins, then heroes and conquerors appear in their proper light, and worthy to be classed with earthquakes and pestilences—as *instruments of Divine vengeance*. So many cares, so much pains, so many mischiefs, merely to support the idea which a *human worm* has formed of his

own grandeur, is a proof that man, by nature, is not only depraved—but infatuated. How awful is the case of those who live and die in such a spirit, and who have multiplied miseries upon their fellow-creatures, in order to support and feed their pride and arrogance! Perhaps they may, upon their entrance to the eternal state, be accosted by multitudes, to the purpose of that sarcastic language in the prophet's sublime ode of triumph over the king of Babylon, Isa. 14:5-17.

But though the effects of this *principle of SELF* are more extensive and calamitous in proportion as those who are governed by it are more elevated, the principle itself is deep-rooted in every heart, and is the spring of every action—until grace infuses a new principle, and self, like Dagon, falls before the Lord Almighty. Great and small are but relative terms; and the passions of discontent, pride, and envy, which, in the breast of a potentate are severely felt by one half of Europe, exert themselves with equal strength in the heart of a peasant, though, for lack of materials and opportunities, their operations are confined within narrow bounds. We are fallen into a state of gross idolatry—and SELF is the idol we worship!

All Things Work Together for Good

September 28, 1774.

My dear friend,

I see the necessity of having, if possible, my principles at my fingers' ends, that I may apply them as occasions arise every hour.

"We know that **all things work together for good** to those who love God—to those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28. Certainly, if my *ability* was equal to my *inclination*, I would remove *your tumor* with a word or a touch—I would exempt you instantly and constantly from every inconvenience and pain! But you are in the hands of One who could do all this and more, and who loves you infinitely better than I can do—and yet He is pleased to permit you to suffer. What is the plain lesson? Certainly, that at the present juncture, He, to whom all the chains of events, and their consequences are present in one view, sees it better for you to have this tumor than to be without it! For I have no more idea of a tumor rising (or any other incidental trial befalling you), without a cause, without a need-be, without a designed advantage to result from it, than I have of a mountain or pyramid rising up of its own accord in the middle of Main Street. The promise is express, and literally true—that all things, universally and without exception, shall work together for good to those who love God. But they work **together!** The *smallest* as well as the *greatest* events have their place and use—like several stones in the arch of a bridge, where no one would singly be useful—but every one in its place is necessary to the structure and support of the arch; or, rather, like the movement of a watch, where, though there is an evident subordination of parts, and some pieces have a greater comparative importance than others—yet the smallest pieces have their place and use, and are so far equally important, that the whole design of the machine would be obstructed for lack of them.

Some workings and turns of Divine Providence may be compared to the main-spring or main-wheels, which have a more visible, sensible, and determining influence upon the whole tenor of our lives. But the more ordinary occurrences of every day are at least *pins* and *pivots*, adjusted, timed, and suited with equal accuracy, by the hand of the

same great Artist who planned and executes the whole! We are sometimes surprised to see how much more depends and turns upon these minor events, than we were aware of. Then we admire his skill, and say "he has done all things well!" Indeed, with respect to his works of providence, as well as of creation, he well deserves the title of *Maximus in minimis*.

Such thoughts as these, when I am enabled to realize them, in some measure reconcile me to whatever he allots for myself or my friends, and convinces me of the propriety of that verse, which speaks the language of love, as well as authority, "Be still—and know that I am God!"

I sympathize with you in your severe trial, and pray and trust that your *Shepherd* will be your *Physician*; will superintend and bless the use of means; will give you in his good time health and cure, and at all times reveal unto you abundance of peace.

His promises and power are necessary for our preservation, in the *smoother scenes* he has allotted for us, and they are likewise sufficient for the *roughest*. We are always equally in danger in ourselves, and always equally safe under the shadow of his wings. No storms, assaults, sieges, or pestilences, can hurt us, until we have filled up his appointed measure of service! And when our work is done, and he has ripened us for glory—it is no great matter by what means he is pleased to call us home to himself!

The Heavenly Gardener

July 22, 1777.

My dear Sir,

The complaints you make of what passes within, encourage me under what I feel myself. Indeed, if those, who, I have reason to believe, are more spiritual and humble than I am, did not give some testimony that they find their hearts made of the same materials as mine is, I should be sometimes hard put to it to believe that I have any part or lot in the matter, or any real knowledge of the life of faith! But this concurrent testimony of many witnesses, confirms me, in what I think the Scripture plainly teaches—that the *soil of human nature*, though many spots are certainly better weeded, planted, and fertilized than others—is everywhere the same—universally bad! The heart is so bad, that it cannot be worse—and of itself is only capable of producing noxious weeds, and nourishing venomous creatures!

We know that culture, skill, and expense will make a garden—where all was desert before. When Jesus, the heavenly gardener, encloses a soil, and separates it from the wasteland of the world, to make it a residence for Himself—a change presently takes place; it is planted and watered from above, and visited with beams infinitely more nourishing and fertilizing than those of the material sun.

But its natural propensity to bring forth weeds still continues, and one half of God's dealings with us, may be compared to a company of weeders, whom He sends forth into His garden—to pluck up all which He has not planted with His own hand; and which, if left to grow, would quickly overpower and over top the rest!

But, alas! the ground is so impregnated with evil seeds, and they shoot in such quick succession, that if this weeding work were not constantly repeated, all former labor would be lost! Hence arises the necessity of daily crosses and disappointments, and such multiplied

convictions that we are nothing, and can do nothing, of ourselves! All these trials are needful, and barely sufficient, to prevent our hearts from being overrun with pride, lust, worldliness and self-dependence.

The Heavenly Builder

November 11, 1775.

My dear Miss M,

Our last visit was very pleasant to myself; if anything that passed was of service to you, we know to whom the thanks are due; for we can neither communicate nor receive anything—but so far as he is pleased to enable us. One reason why he often disappoints us—is that we may learn to depend on him alone. We are prone, as you observe, to rest too much upon sensible comforts—yet they are very desirable, only as to the measure and seasons. It is well to be submissive to his will; to be thankful for them when we have them, and humbly waiting for them when we have them not. They are not, however, the proper ground of our hope; a good hope springs from such a sense of our needs, and such a persuasion of his power and grace—as engages the heart to venture, upon the warrant of his promises, to trust in him for salvation.

In a sense, we are often hindering him by our impatience and unbelief. But, strictly speaking, when he really begins the good work, and gives us a desire which will be satisfied with nothing short of himself—he will not be hindered from carrying it on; for he has said,

I will work, and none shall hinder it. Ah! had it depended upon myself, upon my wisdom or faithfulness, I would have hindered him, and ruined myself long ago! How often have I grieved and resisted his Spirit! But hereby I have learned more of his patience and tenderness, than I could otherwise have known.

He knows our frame, and what effects our evil nature, fermented by the artifices of Satan, will have; he sees us from first to last. A thousand evils arise in our hearts, a thousand wrongnesses in our conduct, which, as they do arise, are new to ourselves, and perhaps at some times we are ready to think we were incapable of such things; but none of them are new to him, to whom past, present, and future are the same. The foresight of them did not prevent his calling us by his grace. Though he knew we were vile, and would prove ungrateful and unfaithful—yet he would be found of us; he would knock at the door of our hearts, and gain himself an entrance. Nor shall they prevent his accomplishing his gracious purpose. It is our part to be abased before him, and quietly to hope and wait for his salvation in the use of his appointed means. The power, success, and blessing—are wholly from himself.

To make us more sensible of this, he often withdraws from our perceptions; and as, in the absence of the sun, the wild beasts of the forest roam abroad; so, when Jesus hides himself, we presently perceive what is in our hearts, and what a poor shift we can make without him. When he returns, his light chases the evils away, and we are well again.

It is your great and singular mercy, my dear Miss, that he has taught you to seek him so early in life. You have entered in the way of salvation—but you must not expect all at once. The work of grace is compared to the corn, and to a building; the *growth* of the one, and

the carrying forward of the other, are *gradual*. In a *building*, for instance, if it is large, there is much to be done in preparing and laying the foundation, before the walls appear above ground; much is doing within, when the work does not seem perhaps to advance without; and when it is considerably forward—yet, being encumbered with scaffolds and rubbish—a bystander sees it at a great disadvantage, and can form but an imperfect judgment of it. But all this while the architect himself, even from the laying of the first stone, conceives of it according to the plan and design he has formed; he prepares and adjusts the materials, disposing each in its proper time and place—and views it, in idea, as already finished. In due season it is completed—but not in a day. The top-stone is fixed, and then, the scaffolds and rubbish being removed—it appears to others as he intended it should be.

Men, indeed, often plan what, for want of skill or ability, or from unforeseen disappointments, they are unable to execute. But nothing can disappoint *the heavenly Builder*; nor will he ever be reproached with forsaking the work of his own hands, or beginning that which he could not or would not accomplish; Phi. 1:6. Let us therefore be thankful for *beginnings*, and patiently wait the outcome. His enemies strive to retard the work, as they did when the Jews, by his order, set about rebuilding the Temple. Yet it was finished, in defiance of them all.

Our Life is a Warfare

March, 1779.

Dear Madam,

Our experiences pretty much tally. They may be drawn out into books—but the sum total may be comprised in a short sentence; "*Our life is a warfare.*" For our encouragement, the Apostle calls it a *good warfare*. We are engaged in a good cause, fight under a good Captain, the victory is sure beforehand, and the prize is a crown—a crown of eternal life. Such considerations might make even a coward bold. But then we must be content to fight; and, considering the nature, number, situation, and subtlety of our enemies, we may expect sometimes to receive a wound. But there is a *medicinal tree*, the leaves of which are always at hand to heal us.

We cannot be too attentive to the evil which is always working in us, or to the stratagems which are employed against us; yet our attention should not be wholly confined to these things. We are to look upwards likewise to him, who is our head, our life, our strength. One glance of Jesus will convey more effectual assistance—than poring upon our own hearts for a month! The one is to be done—but the other should upon no account be omitted. It was not by counting their wounds—but by beholding the brazen serpent, the Lord's instituted means of cure—that the Israelites were healed. That was an emblem for our instruction.

One great cause of our frequent conflicts is, that we have a secret desire to be rich—and it is the Lord's design to make us poor. We want to gain an ability of doing something—and He suits his dispensations, to convince us that we can do nothing. We want a stock of power in ourselves—and He would have us absolutely dependent upon Him. So far as we are content to be weak—that His power may be magnified in us—so far we shall make our enemies know that we are strong, though we ourselves shall never be directly sensible that we are so. Only by comparing what we are, with the

opposition we stand against—we may come to a comfortable conclusion, that the Lord works mightily in us. Psa. 41:11.

If our views are simple, and our desires towards the Lord—it may be of use to consider some of your faults and mine, not as the faults of you and me in particular—but as the fault of that depraved nature, which is common with us to all the Lord's people, and which made Paul groan as feelingly and as heartily as we can do. But this consideration, though true and Scriptural, can only be safely applied when the mind is sincerely and in good earnest devoted to the Lord. There are too many unsound and half-professors, who eagerly catch at it, as an excuse for those evils they are unwilling to part with. But I trust I may safely recommend it to you.

This evil nature, this indwelling sin, is a living principle, an active, powerful cause; and a cause that is active will necessarily produce an effect. Sin is the same thing in believers as in the unregenerate; they have, indeed, a contrary principle of grace, which counteracts and resists it, which can prevent its out breaking—but will not suppress its rising. As grace resists sin, so sin resists grace, "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." Gal. 5:17. The proper tendency of each is mutually weakened on both sides; and between the two, the poor believer, however blameless and exemplary in the sight of men, appears in his own view the most inconsistent character under the sun! He can hardly think it is so with others, and judging of them by what he sees, and of himself by what he feels—in humility he esteems others better than himself.

This is the warfare. But it shall not always be so. Grace shall prevail. The evil nature is already enervated, and before long it shall die the

death. Jesus will make us more than conquerors!

Combating Worldliness

October 3, 1778.

Dear Madam,

You would have me tell you what are the best means to be used by a young person, to prevent the world, with all its seductive and insnaring scenes, from drawing the heart aside from God. It is an important question; but I apprehend your own heart will tell you, that you are already possessed of all the information concerning it which you can well expect from me. I could only attempt to answer it from the Bible, which lies open to you likewise.

If your heart is like mine, it must confess, that when it turns aside from God it is seldom through ignorance of the proper means or motives which should have kept us near him—but rather from an evil principle within, which prevails against our better judgment, and renders us unfaithful to light already received.

I could offer you rules, cautions, and advises in abundance; for I find it comparatively easy to preach to others. But if you should farther ask me, how you shall effectually reduce them to practice; I feel that I am so deficient, and so much at a loss in this matter myself, that I know not well what to say to you. Yet something must be said.

In the first place, then, I would observe, that though it is our bounded duty, and the highest privilege we can propose to ourselves,

to have our hearts kept close to the Lord; yet we must not expect it absolutely or perfectly, much less all at once. We shall keep close to him in proportion as we are solidly convinced of the infinite disparity between him and the things which would presume to stand in competition with him, and the *folly*, as well as *ingratitude*, of departing from him. But these points are only to be learned by experience, and by smarting under a series of painful disappointments in our expectations from creatures. Our *judgments* may be quickly satisfied that his favor is better than life, while yet it is in the power of a *mere trifle* to turn us aside.

The Lord permits us to feel our weakness, that we may be sensible of it; for though we are ready in words to confess that we are weak, we do not so properly know it, until that secret, though unallowed, dependence we have upon some strength in ourselves is brought to the trial, and fails us. To be humble, and, like a little child, afraid of taking a step alone, and so conscious of snares and dangers around us, as to cry to him continually to hold us up that we may be safe—is the sure, the infallible, the only secret of walking closely with him.

But how shall we attain this humble frame of spirit? It must be, as I said, from a real and sensible conviction of our weakness and vileness, which we cannot learn (at least I have not been able to learn it) merely from books or preachers. The providence of God concurs with his Holy Spirit in his merciful design of making us acquainted with ourselves. It is indeed a great mercy to be preserved from such declensions as might fall under the notice of our fellow-creatures; but when they can observe nothing of consequence to object to us, things may be far from right with us, in the sight of Him who judges not only actions—but the thoughts and first motions of the heart. And indeed could we for a season so cleave to God as to find little or nothing in ourselves to be ashamed of, we are such poor creatures,

that we should presently grow vain and self-sufficient, and expose ourselves to the greatest danger of falling.

There are, however, means to be observed on our part; and though you know them, I will repeat the principal, because you desire me. The first is **Prayer**; and here, above all things, we should pray for humility. It may be called both the guard of all other graces, and the soil in which they grow.

The second, Attention to the **Scripture**. Your question is directly answered in Psa. 119:9, "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word and following its rules." The *precepts* of the Word are our rule and delight the *promises* our strength and encouragement. The *good* recorded of the saints is proposed for our encouragement; their *miscarriages* are as land-marks set up to warn us of the rocks and shoals which lie in the way of our passage.

The study of the whole scheme of Gospel salvation, respecting the person, life, doctrine, death, and glory of our Redeemer, is appointed to form our souls to a spiritual and divine taste. And so far as this prevails and grows in us, the trifles which would draw us from the Lord, will lose their influence, and appear, divested of the glare with which they strike the senses—as mere vanity and emptiness.

The third grand means is, **Consideration** or Recollection; a careful regard to those temptations and snares, to which, from our tempers, situations, or connections, we are more immediately exposed, and by which we have been formerly hindered. It may be well in the morning, before we leave our chambers, to forecast, as far as we are able, the probable circumstances of the day before us. Yet the observance of this, as well as of every rule that can be offered, may dwindle into a mere form. However, I trust the Lord, who has given

you a desire to live to him, will be your guard and teacher. There is none who teaches like him.

Theological Systems

John Newton, 1786

(From the *preface* of his fifty expository discourses on the MESSIAH)

From those Readers, whose habits of thinking on religious subjects, are formed by a close attachment to particular *systems of divinity*, the Author requests a candid construction of what he advances, if he ventures, in some instances, to deviate a little from the more beaten track. If he is, sometimes, constrained to differ from the judgment of wise and good men, who have deserved well of the Church of God, he would do it modestly. Far from depreciating their labors, he would be thankful for the benefit which he hopes he has received from them. It is a great satisfaction to him, that in all doctrinal points of primary importance, his views are confirmed by the suffrage of writers and ministers eminent for genuine piety, and found learning; who assisted him in his early enquiries after truth, and at whose feet he is still willing to sit. And yet, remembering that he is authorized and commanded to *call no man master*, so as to yield an implicit and unqualified submission to human teachers; while he gladly borrows every help he can, from others, he ventures, likewise, to think for himself.

His leading sentiments concerning the grand peculiarities of the Gospel, were formed many years since, when he was in a state of almost entire seclusion from society; when he had scarcely any

religious book, but the Bible, within his reach; and had no knowledge, either of the various names, parties, and opinions, by which, Christians were distinguished and divided, or of the controversies which existed among them. He is not conscious, that any very material difference has taken place in his sentiments, since he first became acquainted with the religious world; but, after a long course of experience and observation, he seems to possess them in a different manner. The difficulties, which, for a season, perplexed him, on some points, are either removed, or considerably abated. On the other hand, he now perceives difficulties, that constrain him to lay his hand upon his mouth, in subjects, which, once appeared to him obvious and plain. Thus, if he mistakes not himself, he is less troubled with skepticism, and at the same time, less disposed to be dogmatic, than he formerly was. He feels himself unable to draw the line, with precision, between those *essential* points, which ought to be earnestly contended for (in a spirit of meekness) as for the faith once delivered to the saints; and certain *secondary* positions, concerning which, good men may safely differ, and wherein, perhaps, we cannot reasonably expect them to be unanimous, during the present state of imperfection. But if the exact boundary cannot be marked with certainty, he thinks it both desirable and possible, to avoid the extremes, into which men of warm tempers have often been led.

Not that the Author can be an advocate for that *indifference to truth*, which, under specious semblance of toleration and candor, offers a comprehension, from which none are excluded—but those who profess, and aim, to worship God in the Spirit, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to renounce all confidence in the flesh. *Toleration* is a Christian grace. It differs much from that tame, unfeeling neutrality between truth and error, which is so prevalent in this present day. As the different rays of light, which, when separated by a prism exhibit

the various colors of the rainbow, form, in their combination, a perfect and resplendent white, in which every color is incorporated; so, if the graces of the Holy Spirit were complete in us, the result of their combined effect, would be a truly candid, moderate, and liberal spirit towards our brethren.

The Christian, especially he who is advanced and established in the life of faith, has a fervent zeal for God, for the honor of His name, His law, and His Gospel. The honest warmth which he feels, when such a law is broken, when such a Gospel is despised, and when the great and glorious name of the Lord his God is profaned; would, by the occasion of his infirmities, often degenerate into anger or contempt, towards those who oppose themselves, if he was under the influence of zeal alone. But his *zeal* is *blended* with *benevolence* and *humility*; it is softened by a consciousness of his own frailty and fallibility. He is aware that his knowledge is very limited in itself, and very faint in its efficacy; that his *attainments* are weak and few, compared with his *deficiencies*; that his *gratitude* is very disproportionate to his *obligations*, and his *obedience* unspeakably short of conformity to his prescribed rule; that he has nothing but what he has received, and has received nothing—but what, in a greater or less degree, he has misapplied and misimproved. He is therefore a debtor to the mercy of God, and lives upon his multiplied forgiveness.

He makes the gracious conduct of the Lord towards himself, a pattern for his own conduct towards his fellow-creatures. He cannot boast, nor is he forward to censure. He considers himself, lest he also be tempted (Galatians 6:1); and thus he learns tenderness and compassion to others, and to bear patiently with those mistakes, prejudices, and errors in them, which once belonged to his own character; and from which, as yet, he is but imperfectly freed. But then, the same considerations, which inspire him with meekness and

gentleness, towards those who, oppose the truth, strengthen his regard for the truth itself, and his conviction of its importance. For the sake of peace, which he loves and cultivates, he accommodates himself, as far as he lawfully can—to the weakness and misapprehensions of those who mean well; though he is thereby exposed to the censure of bigots of all parties, who deem him flexible and wavering, like a reed shaken with the wind.

But there are other points, nearly connected with the honor of God, and essential to the life of faith, which are the foundations of his hope, and the sources of his joy. For his firm attachment to these, he is content to be treated as a bigot himself. For here, he is immovable as an iron pillar, nor can either the *fear*, or the *favor* of man—prevail on him to give place, no not for an hour! (Galatians 2:5). Here his judgment is fixed; and he expresses it, in simple and unequivocal language, so as not to leave, either friends or enemies, in suspense, concerning the side which he has chosen, or the cause which is nearest to his heart.

The minister who possesses a candor, thus enlightened, and thus qualified, will neither degrade himself to be the instrument, nor aspire to the head, of a party. He will not servilely tread in the paths prescribed him by *men*, however respectable. He will not multiply contentions, in defense, either of the shibboleths of others, or of any hobby-horse of his own, under the pretense that he is pleading for the cause of God, and truth. His attention will not be restrained to the interest of any detached denomination of Christians—but extended to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity.

On the other hand, knowing that the Gospel is the wisdom and power of God, and the only possible mean, by which, fallen man can obtain either peace or rectitude, he most cordially embraces and

avows it. Far from being ashamed of it, he esteems it his glory. He preaches Christ Jesus the Lord, and Him crucified. He dares not handle the Word of God deceitfully (2 Corinthians 4:2), disguise, or soften the doctrines of the grace of God, to render them more *palatable* to the depraved taste of the times. He disdains the thought! And he will no more encounter the prejudices, and corrupt maxims and practices of the world, with any weapon—but the truth as it is in Jesus (Ephesians 4:21), than he would venture to fight an enraged enemy, with a paper sword.

Such is the disposition which the Author wishes for himself, and which, he would endeavor to cultivate in others. He hopes that nothing, of a contrary tendency, will be found in the volumes now presented to the Public. The MESSIAH is the leading and principal subject of every sermon. His person, grace, and glory; His matchless love to sinners; His humiliation, sufferings, and death; His ability and willingness to save to the uttermost; His kingdom, and the present and future happiness of His willing people; are individually considered, according to the order suggested by the series of texts. Nearly connected with these topics, are the doctrines of the fall and depravity of man; the agency of the Holy Spirit; the nature and necessity of regeneration, and of that holiness, without which, no man shall see the Lord. On these subjects, the Author is not afraid of contradictions, from those who are taught of God.

With respect to some other points which incidentally occur, he has endeavored so to treat them, as to avoid administering fuel to the flame of angry controversy. He is persuaded himself, and shall be happy to persuade his readers, that the remaining differences of opinion, among those who truly understand, and cordially believe the declarations of Scripture, on the preceding articles—are neither so wide, nor so important, as they have sometimes been represented.

Many of these differences are *merely verbal*, and would cease, if due allowance was made for the imperfection of human language, and the effects of an accustomed phraseology, which often lead people to affix different ideas to the same expressions, or to express the same ideas in different words.

And if, in some things, we cannot exactly agree, since we confess that we are all weak and fallible, mutual patience and forbearance, would be equally befitting the acknowledgements we make, and the Gospel which we profess. We should, thereby, act in character, as the followers of Him who was compassionate to the infirmities and mistakes of His disciples, and taught them—not every thing at once—but gradually, as they were able to bear.

The Author ought not to be very solicitous, upon his own account, what reception his writings may meet with. The fashion of this world is passing away. The voice, both of applause and of censure, will soon be stifled in the dust. It is, therefore—but a small thing to be judged of man's judgment (1 Corinthians 4:3). But conscious of the vast importance of the subject, which he thus puts into the Reader's hands, he cannot take leave of him, without earnestly entreating his serious attention.

The one principle, which, he assumes for granted, and which, he is certain cannot be disproved, is, That the Bible is a revelation from God. By this standard, he is willing, that whatever he has advanced, may be tried. If the Bible is true, we must all give an account, each one of himself, to the great and final Judge. That when we shall appear before His solemn tribunal, we may be found at His right hand, accepted in the Beloved, is the Author's fervent prayer, both for his Readers and for himself.

The Comforts and Snares of Social and Relative Affections

Alas! how difficult do we find it to observe a proper medium between overvaluing and undervaluing our creature-comforts; especially those of social and relative life. The mutual affection which does, or should exist, between husband and wife, parents and children, and proportionally between other family connections, or our intimate and tried friends, constitute our chief temporal pleasures. These are almost the only pleasures this earth can afford, which are very interesting to an intelligent and serious mind. For these the *voluptuary* has little relish—*sensuality* has blunted his feelings, and his gratifications are scarcely superior to those of the brutes.

Such people are not at present concerned in the subject of this paper, nor can they well understand it. I write for those who possess and value the *comforts of domestic life*, acknowledge the goodness of the Lord in bestowing and preserving them, who wish to make them additional motives for gratitude and praise—but are often apprehensive that their attachments to God's gifts, should withdraw their thoughts from the great Giver, and encroach upon that supreme regard which is only due to himself.

A disposition to love the *creature* more than the *Creator*—is undoubtedly a part of a proof of our natural depravity. This evil principle, described by the apostle under the names of the *Flesh*, the *Old Man*, and *Indwelling Sin*, however weakened and mortified in a true believer—is not extirpated. The opposition between nature and grace, flesh and spirit, renders the Christian life a state of constant warfare. They are opposite, contrary, contradictory one to the other; no peace or truce can exist between them. The effects of this conflict

extend to every faculty. When **grace** is in exercise, the motions of sin are noticed, checked and lamented—but they are always sufficiently strong to render our best intentions and best actions defective and polluted. And particularly, to depreciate and adulterate the finest feelings of humanity, and to turn our glory into shame. Thus our *comforts* often become our snares; and that which should be for our health proves an occasion of falling.

We cannot be too watchful against this propensity; it should prompt us to daily humiliation, and much prayer. But the Lord is not a hard master; he gives us all things richly to enjoy; not to raise, and then disappoint our expectations—but, within the limits his wisdom prescribes, to *gratify* them. Ignorance and superstition misrepresent him. Under their influence multitudes think to please them by self-invented austerities and mortifications, and suppose they shall be acceptable to him, in proportion as they make themselves miserable. But, on the contrary, we are assured that he delights in our prosperity—so far as it is consistent with our safety; and that he does not willingly afflict His own children, who love and serve him. He has placed us in a world, in which (considered as his world) everything is beautiful in its season, proper use, and due subordination, to our chief good; though considered as *man's world*, our apostasy has filled it with confusion and misery.

Contemplate his goodness in a *rural situation*. Light colors, and prospects, are suited to please the eye. The singing of birds, the lowing of the cattle, the bleating of the sheep, and in general, the inarticulate tones of all the animal tribes, are soothing and grateful to the ear. During a great part of the year, the scent of blossoms and flowers perfumes the air, and regales the sense of smelling. *Food* is a necessary means for the preservation of life, and would be so if it were no less unpalatable than the most nauseous drugs. But we are

furnished with a profusion and variety of foods, which, while they satisfy our hunger, and recruit our strength, are likewise grateful to the palate, and accommodated to the different tastes of different people. Nay, he has not only given us *food*—but *fruits*. These are certainly not *needful* for the support of life, nor are they *forbidden* like the fruit of the tree of knowledge—but are freely presented for our use.

Things might have been so constituted, that all our sensations from external objects would have been disagreeable and painful. But God is good. We would live in the midst of continual enjoyments if we obeyed his precepts, and observed his regulations; which, however contrary to the evil dispositions of our fallen nature, amount to no more than the kind admonition, "Do yourself no harm!" For there is not a single restriction enjoined by the Scripture, with which it would not be *our best interest* to comply, if the authority of God was wholly out of the question. But sin, where it prevails, dishonors God, abuses his gifts, and throws all into confusion. Intemperance, riot, and disorderly passions, have filled the earth with woe!

Thus, as we are creatures formed for society, and cannot live, either with safety or comfort, in a solitary state, it has pleased God in his goodness—to make us susceptible to social affections, which sweeten our fellowship with each other, and combine duty with pleasure. Parents are certainly bound by the law of nature to take care of their own children, and to provide for them; especially in the helpless state of infancy, when they are utterly unable to take care of themselves. This would often be a irksome task, if they did not feel *an instinctive tenderness* for their infant offspring at first sight, which makes that delightful, which might otherwise be troublesome.

It is likewise the appointment of God, that the successive generations of mankind should be perpetuated by marriage. As this is the nearest of all natural relations, so when the union is properly formed and conducted, it is the most interesting and endeared. This union, by the will of God, is in itself indissoluble until death makes a separation, excepting in the single case of marital unfaithfulness. But the marriage state when entered into without a regard to God, to the rules of his Word, and a dependence upon his blessing, is seldom productive of an abiding union of hearts; and if this is lacking, the case of either party may be compared to that of a dislocated limb, which is indeed still united to the body—but, not being in its proper place and connection, is useless and painful itself, and the cause of pain and uneasiness to the whole body.

Even the marriages of those who come together, and live together, in the fear of the Lord, are subject to heavy troubles—doubled in wedlock, and frequently multiplied in children—they have a larger share of cares, duties, and anxieties, than those who live single; yet they are comparatively happy. And I think, all things considered, they have the most favored lot. They love the Lord, they seek his presence and blessing, and they do not seek in vain. They love each other, they have one faith, one aim, one hope. Their mutual affection, intimacy, and perfect confidence, greatly enhance the value and relish of the comforts in which they participate, and alleviate the weight of their burdens and trials. Love sweetens labor, and blunts the sting of sorrow. The vicissitudes of life give energy to prayer; and repeated supports and deliverances, in answer to prayer, afford new motives and causes for praise and thanksgiving.

But still they are jealous of themselves, lest those affectionate feelings, which greatly assist them in discharging their social and relative duties with attention and cheerfulness, should become

excessive and *idolatrous*. And, as I have already observed, they have reason to be always on their guard, lest that which is lawful and right in itself, should, by being indulged in an immoderate degree, become ensnaring and hurtful.

A true believer is, for the most part, rather *shocked*, than *seduced*—by temptations to gross evils; his heart recoils at the proposal. He thinks with Joseph, "How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God? The believer's chief danger, lies in *the abuse of lawful things*.

The relation we stand in to **God**, as his intelligent creatures, from whom we derive all that we have or are, and on whom we depend for every breath we draw, makes it our indispensable duty to love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. And, as we have broken this law of our creation, he has in mercy been pleased to claim us for his own by a new and more endearing title. He has redeemed us to himself—by His blood. He has bought us with a price, and paid his life as a ransom for our souls. When a sinner is enabled to feel the force of this argument, he needs no more—the love of Christ constrains him. From that moment he is made willing to devote himself, and his all—to him who died for him. But the flesh strives against the Spirit; he is still a poor creature. He cannot do the things *that* he would, nor *as* he would; otherwise every thought of His heart should be in absolute subjection to his Lord and Savior.

The Lord, who knows our frame, and of what we are made, is unspeakably merciful to our infirmities—but he will not admit a *rival*. The believer knows and acknowledges, that whatever he possesses, which is not held and improved in subordination and subservience to the will and glory of him from whom he received it—is so far an idol! And the consciousness of his proneness to afford these *intruders* an undue share in his affections, often makes him

confess to the Lord with Job, "Behold, I am vile!" though his outward conduct in the sight of men may be unblamable and exemplary.

Yet perhaps some people may be overburdened with this apprehension. The gospel is not designed to make us stoics—it allows full room for those social feelings which are so necessary and beneficial in our present state, though it teaches and enjoins their due regulations. It is the duty, no less than the privilege, of husbands, to love their wives, even as their own selves; yes, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it. These expressions are very strong; they imply great love, tenderness, and sympathy. When the Lord said to Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love," he did not reprove him for loving his child; and Abraham's prompt obedience, when commanded to offer up his beloved son, was a proof that, though his love to Isaac was *strong*, it was not *inordinate*. And the apostle declares, "that, if any man provides not for those of his own household—he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." He is to provide for them, if in his power, in preference to others, which plainly intimates that they are preferably entitled to his love. Friendship, likewise, between those who are joint partakers of grace, is very consistent with true religion. Such was the friendship between David and Jonathan. And though our Lord loved all his disciples, one of them is honored with a peculiar distinction, as "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

God formed us originally for himself, and endued the human mind with a capacity which he alone can fill. But, when he dwells in the heart, there is still room for innumerable objects of happiness, in their proper subordinate order. When a woman marries, she may continue to love her own parents and relatives as formerly; she may extend her affection and regard to the parents and friends of her husband; in a course of years the number of those whom she loves

and values may be greatly increased, without interfering with each other, or with that love which she owes to her husband. But there is a different and special regard due to him, which if she should transfer to another person, she would be criminal. Thus we may love, and we ought to love, our husbands, wives, children, parents, and friends; and, if we consider them as the Lord's gifts—if we seek his blessing in them and upon them—if we hold them at his disposal—if we employ all our influence with them, to engage them to seek and love him supremely—if, when they are removed from us, we are disposed to yield a cheerful submission to his holy will—and if, when things are brought into competition, we rather choose to venture displeasing our dearest friends, than to sin against the Lord—with these *restrictions* we cannot easily love them too much.

But who can come up to this standard? I suppose no person can completely. But we may *aim* at it; we may lament our deficiency; we may pray for more grace; and by grace we may approximate more and more to it.

It is not necessary to distress ourselves with what may happen; as, how should I behave, if the Lord were to take the desire of my eyes from me suddenly? We are to live *today*—and to leave *tomorrow* with him. If we presume that we could support such a stroke, we should probably find it too heavy for us. But this we may say, The Lord is all-sufficient, and he is faithful. He has promised *strength according to the day*. He permits me to call upon him in the time of trouble, and I trust, when the time of trouble shall come—he will enable me to pray for that help from him, without which I know I must sink; for in myself I am weaker than a bruised reed. In the meantime I endeavor to cast all my care upon him who cares for me.

For the rest, we are in the Lord's school—the school of the cross. His daily providential dispensations are suited to wean our attachment from everything here on earth, and to convince us that this world cannot be our rest—for it is polluted. Our roses grow on thorns, our honey bears a sting. Frequently our sharpest trials—spring from our choicest comforts. Perhaps, while we are admiring our *gourd*—a *worm* is secretly preying upon its root. As every bitter thing is sweetened to a believer, so there is some bitter thing mingled with every sweet. This is wisely and mercifully ordered by our heavenly Father. It is necessary. With such *hearts* as we have, and in such a *world* as we live in—much discipline is needful to keep us from *sleeping* upon the *enchanted ground*.

But the time is short. It will not be thus always. We hope soon to be out of the reach of sin and temptation. Happy hour, when sorrow and mourning, hitherto our inseparable companions, shall flee away, to return no more! When joy and gladness shall come forth to meet us, and conduct us to our eternal home! Then those who have loved each other in the Lord upon earth, shall rejoice together before him, shall drink of the rivers of pleasure that are at his right hand, and their happiness shall be unspeakable, uninterrupted, without abatement, and without end!

The Call to the Ministry

March 7, 1765.

Dear Sir,

Your letter of February 19th came to me yesterday. I have read it with attention, and very willingly sit down to offer you my thoughts. Your case reminds me of my own—my first desires towards the *ministry* were attended with great uncertainties and difficulties, and the

perplexity of my own mind was heightened by the various and opposite judgments of my friends. The advice I have to offer is the result of painful experience and exercise, and for this reason perhaps may not be unacceptable to you. I pray our gracious Lord to make it useful.

I was long distressed, as you are, about what was or was not a **proper call to the ministry**. It now seems to me an easy point to solve—but perhaps will not be so to you until the Lord shall make it clear to yourself in your own case. I have not room to say so much as I could. in brief, I think it principally includes three things:

1. A warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service. I apprehend, the man who is once moved by the Spirit of God to this work, will prefer it, if attainable, to thousands of gold and silver; so that, though he is at times intimidated by a sense of its *importance* and *difficulty*, compared with *his own great insufficiency* (for it is to be presumed a call of this sort, if indeed from God, will be accompanied with *humility* and *self-abasement*), yet he cannot give it up. I hold it a good rule to inquire in this point—whether the desire to preach is most fervent in our most lively and spiritual frames, and when we are most laid in the dust before the Lord? If so, it is a good sign. But if, as is sometimes the case, a person is very earnest to be a preacher to others, when he finds but little hungering and thirstiness after grace in his own soul—it is then to be feared his zeal springs rather from a *selfish* principle—than from the Spirit of God.

2. Besides this affectionate desire and readiness to preach, **there must in due season appear some competent sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance.** Surely, if the Lord sends a man to teach others—he will furnish him with the *means*. I believe

many have *intended* well in becoming preachers, who yet went beyond or before their call in so doing. The main difference between a *minister* and a *private Christian* seems to consist in these *ministerial gifts*, which are imparted to him, not for his own sake—but for the edification of others. But then I say, these are to appear in due season. They are not to be expected instantaneously—but gradually, in the use of proper means. They are necessary for the discharge of the ministry; but not necessary as pre-requisites to warrant our desires after it. In your case, you are young, and have time before you. Therefore, I think you need not as yet perplex yourself with inquiring if you have these gifts already. It is sufficient if your *desire* is fixed, and you are willing, in the way of prayer and diligence, to wait upon the Lord for them—as yet you need them not.

3. That which finally evidences a proper call—is a correspondent opening in Providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place—of actually entering upon the work of the ministry. And until this concurrence arrives, you must not expect to be always clear from hesitation in your own mind. The principal caution on this head is, not to be too hasty in catching at first appearances. If it be the Lord's will to bring you into his ministry—he has already appointed your place and service; and though you know it not at present—you shall at a proper time. If you had the talents of an angel—you could do no good with them until *his* hour has come—and until he leads you to the people whom he has determined to bless by your means.

It is very difficult to restrain ourselves within the bounds of prudence here, when our zeal is warm, a sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts, and a tender compassion for perishing sinners is ready to prompt us to break out too soon—but "he who believes shall not make haste". I was about five years under this constraint. Sometimes

I thought I must preach, though it was in the streets. I listened to everything that seemed plausible, and to many things that were not so. But the Lord graciously, and as it were insensibly, hedged up my way with thorns; otherwise, if I had been left to my own spirit, I would have put it quite out of my power to have been brought into such a sphere of usefulness, as he in his good time has been pleased to lead me to. And I can now see clearly, that at the time I would first have gone out, though my intention was, I hope, good in the main—yet I overrated myself, and had not that spiritual judgment and experience which are requisite for so great a service.

I wish you therefore to take time; and if you have a desire to enter into the *Established Church*, endeavor to keep your zeal within moderate bounds, and avoid everything that might unnecessarily clog your admission with difficulties. I would not have you hide your profession, or to be backward to speak for God; but avoid what looks like preaching, and be content with being a *learner* in the school of Christ for some years. The *delay* will not be *lost* time; you will be so much the more acquainted with the *Gospel*, with your own *heart*, and with *human nature*. The last is a necessary branch of a minister's knowledge, and can only be acquired by comparing what passes within us, and around us—with what we read in the Word of God.

I am glad to find you have a distaste both for *Arminian* and *Antinomian* doctrines—but let not the mistakes of others sit too heavy upon you. Be thankful for the grace which has made you to differ; be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear; but *beware of engaging in **theological disputes***, without evident necessity, and some probable hope of usefulness. They tend to eat out the life and savor of religion, and to make the soul lean and dry. Where God has begun a real work of

grace, *incidental mistakes* will be lessened by time and experience; where he has not, it is of little signification what sentiments people hold, or whether they call themselves Arminians or Calvinists.

I agree with you, that there is time enough for you to think of Oxford yet; and that if your purpose is fixed, and all circumstances render it prudent and proper to devote yourself to the ministry, you will do well to spend a year or two in private studies. It would be further helpful, in this view, to place yourself where there is Gospel preaching, and a spiritual people. If your favorable opinion of our church should induce you to come here, I shall be very ready to give you every assistance in my power. As I have trod exactly the path you seem to be setting out in, I might so far perhaps be more serviceable than those who are in other respects much better qualified to assist you. I doubt not but in this, and every other step, you will entreat the Lord's direction; and I hope you will not forget to pray for me.

An Essay on the *Character* of the Apostle Paul, Considered as an *Example* and *Pattern* of a Minister of Jesus Christ

by John Newton, 1769

"You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings." 2 Timothy 3:10-11

I. The characteristic excellence of Paul, which was as the *spring* or *source* of every other grace—was **the ardency of the supreme love he bore to his Lord and Savior**. It would not be easy to find

many periods throughout his epistles which do not evidence the fullness of his heart in this respect. He seems delighted even with the sound of the *name* of Jesus, so that, regardless of the *cold rules of academic composition*, we find him repeating it ten times in the compass of ten successive verses. (1 Cor. 1:1-10) He was so struck with the just claim the Savior had to every heart, that he accounted a lack of love to him—as the highest pitch of ingratitude and wickedness, and deserving the utmost severity of wrath and ruin. (1 Cor. 16:22)

When he was conscious that, for his unwearied application to the service of the Gospel, in defiance of the many dangers and deaths which awaited him in every place—he appeared to many as one beside himself, and transported beyond the bounds of sober reason; he thought it a sufficient apology to say, "The love of Christ constrains us!" (2 Cor. 5:14) "We are content to be fools for his sake, to be despised so he may be honored, to be nothing in ourselves that he may be all in all." He had such a sense of the glorious, invaluable excellence of the person of Christ, of his adorable condescension in taking the nature and curse of sinners upon himself, and his complete suitableness and sufficiency, as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of his people—that he often seems at a loss for words answerable to the emotions of his heart! And when he has exhausted the powers of language, and astonished his readers with his inimitable energy, he intimates a conviction of his inability to do justice to a subject—the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of which are too great for our feeble capacities to grasp!

But, besides these general views, he was particularly affected with the *exceeding abundant love and grace of Christ to himself*, when he reflected on the circumstances in which the Lord had found him, and the great things he had done for him. That he who had before been a

persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious—should be forgiven, accepted as a child of God, entrusted with the ministry of the Gospel, and appointed to everlasting salvation—was indeed an instance of wonderful grace! So it appeared to himself, and at the thought of it he often seems to forget his present subject, and breaks forth into inimitable digressions to the praise of Him who had loved him, and given himself for him!

Happily convinced of the tendency and efficacy of this principle in himself, he proposes it to others, instead of a thousand arguments, whenever he would inculcate the most unreserved obedience to the whole will of God, or stir up believers to a holy diligence in adorning the doctrine of their God and Savior in all things. And his exhortations to the conscientious discharge of the various duties of family life, are generally enforced by this grand motive. In a word, *at all times, and in all places, the habitual and favorite subject that employed his thoughts, his tongue, and his pen—was the love of Christ!*

Supported and animated by this love, he exerted himself to the utmost, in promoting the knowledge of him whom he loved, and bearing testimony to his power and grace. Nothing could dishearten, or weary or terrify, or bribe him from his duty!

This love to Jesus, must and will be universally, the leading principle of a faithful minister. Should a man possess the tongue of men and angels, the finest genius, and the most admired accomplishments, if he is not constrained and directed by the love of Christ—he will either do nothing, or nothing to the purpose. He will be unable to support either the *frowns* or the *smiles* of the world. His studies and endeavors will certainly be influenced by low and selfish views. Selfish interest or a desire of applause may stimulate him to shine as

a scholar, a critic, or a philosopher; but until the love of Christ rules in His heart, he will neither have *inclination* nor *power* to exert himself for the glory of God, or the good of souls!

II. The inseparable *effect*, and one of the surest *evidences* of love to Christ, is a **love to his people**. Of this likewise, our apostle exhibits an instructive and affecting example. The warmth and cordiality of his love to those who loved his Lord and Master, appear in every page of his writings. He so rejoiced in their prosperity, that to hear of it, at any time, made him in a manner forget his own sorrows, when encompassed with troubles on every side. And though, in many instances, he did not meet that grateful return he had reason to expect, yet he could not be discouraged. But when he had occasion to expostulate with some upon this account, he adds, "I will still gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more I love you—the less I am loved." (2 Cor. 12:15) Of such a generous temper as this, the world, would they observe it, must acknowledge (as the magicians in Egypt), "This is the finger of God!" For nothing but his grace can produce a conduct so contrary to the natural inclination of man, as to persevere and increase in kindness and affection to those who persevere in requiting it with coldness and ingratitude!

His epistles to the Thessalonians abound in such expressions and strains of tenderness, as would doubtless be generally admired, were they not overlooked, through the unhappy disregard which too many show to that best of books in which they are contained. When he is appealing to themselves concerning the sincerity of his conduct, and how far he had been from abusing his authority, he says, "We were gentle among you, as a *nursing mother* nurtures her own children,"—who, by her tender and assiduous offices, supplies their inability to take care of themselves. (1Th. 2:7-8)

He then adds, "We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us!" No comment can do justice to the spirit of this sentiment.

In another passage, "We were *forced* to leave you," (1 Th. 2:17) the original term has an emphasis which no single word in our language can answer. It imports such a state of separation as is made between a parent and a child by the death of either, when the child is left a helpless and exposed orphan, or the parent is bereaved of the staff and comfort of his old age. It beautifully intimates the *endearing affection* which subsisted between the apostle and the people he was writing to, and demonstrates the greatest tenderness, simplicity, and love.

But his regard went beyond *words*, and was evidenced by the whole course of his *actions*. Nor was it confined to those who had enjoyed the benefits of his personal ministry; his heart was charged with the care and welfare of *all the churches*; and even those who had not seen his face, had an unceasing share in his solicitude and prayers, (Col. 2:1) Nay, so strong was his love to the churches, that it balanced his habitual desire to be with Christ; he could not determine which was best choice—to suffer with the *members* upon earth (so that he might be serviceable to them), or to reign with the *Head* in heaven. (Phi. 1:23-24) In the passage referred to, we see the happy *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces which carried him on through the circle of duty—he constantly tended and gravitated to his center of rest; but successive opportunities of usefulness and service drew him off, and made him willing to wait yet longer.

In this part of his character we are not to consider him exclusively as an *apostle*. All who have truly known the Gospel to be the power of

God unto salvation, are partakers of the same spirit, *according to the measure of their faith*. That person is unworthy the name of a Christian, who does not feel a concern and affection for his brethren who are in the world. It must be allowed that prejudices and misapprehensions too often prevent the Lord's people from knowing each other; but, so far as they believe a person to be a child of God through faith—they cannot but love him. This is the immutable criterion which our Lord himself has given, whereby his real disciples are to be known and acknowledged. (John 13:35) He has not directed us to judge by their *discourses*, their *knowledge*, or even their *zeal*—but by the evidence they give of *mutual love*! We may as easily conceive of a sun without light, or a cause without an effect, as of a person duly affected with a sense of the glory of God and the love of Christ—and not proportionally filled with a spirit of love to all who are like-minded. But especially this disposition is essential to a *minister* of the Gospel, and the apostle assures us, that all imaginable qualifications are of no avail without it! Though we could possess the powers of a prophet or an angel, or the zeal of a martyr—if we are destitute of this love—we are, in the sight of God—but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

III. Paul's inflexible attachment to the great *doctrines* of the Gospel is another part of his character which deserves our attention. He knew their worth, *experienced their power in his own soul*, and saw that, though they were unacceptable to the wisdom of the world, they bore the impress of the manifold wisdom of God. He takes notice that, in those early days, there were many who "corrupted" the Word of God. (2 Cor. 2:17) *Corrupted* properly signifies to adulterate; to imitate the practice of dishonest winemakers, who mix and sophisticate their liquors, so that, though the *color* is preserved, and the *taste* perhaps nearly counterfeited, the quality and properties are quite altered. But he says, "We are not

as they." He preached the Gospel in its *purity* and *simplicity*, the sincere, genuine milk of the word, (1 Peter 2:2) neither *weakened* by water, nor *disguised* by any artful sweetening to render it more palatable. He added nothing of his own, nor employed any *arts* or *gloss* to palliate the truth—that it might be more acceptable to men of carnal minds.

As he was not *ashamed* of it, neither was he *afraid* lest it should fall without success to the ground, if not supported and assisted by *inventions* of his own. He knew whose Word it was, and therefore cheerfully ventured the outcome with him, who alone could procure it a welcome reception. And as he disdained the thought of himself deviating one iota from the plain and full declaration of the truth—neither could he bear, no, not for an hour, with any others who presumed to do so. (Galatians 2:5) I doubt not but the warmth of his zeal, in this respect, has disgusted many in the present day, wherein a *seeming candor* and *tolerance* is pleaded for and extended to almost every foolish sentiment—*except* the truths in which Paul gloried! There is little doubt but many, if they had the courage and honesty to speak out, would add Paul himself to the list of those whom they despise as uncharitable, and hot-brained, narrow-minded bigots; for who has offended more than he—against the rules of that *indifference to error*, which is at present miscalled *love*?

The *Galatians*, in a short time after he left them, had ventured to admit some alteration in the doctrine they had received from him—it was chiefly in one point. They had been persuaded into an undue regard for the *law of Moses*. This, some may think, was little more than a secondary matter; that it could not have any great or direct influence upon their moral practice, and that they might be very good Christians, though, in this one thing, they could not see exactly with their teacher's eyes. But how different was the apostle's

judgement! If the Galatians had returned to the practice of *idolatry*, or broke out into the most *scandalous immoralities*—Paul could hardly have expressed his surprise and grief in stronger terms! He changes his usual manner of address, and speaks to them as a *foolish* people (Galatians 3:1) under the power of some unaccountable fascination. He tells them that, by admitting such an addition, (Galatians 1:6-9) small and inconsiderable as they might think it—they had, in effect, received another Gospel—which was, however, so enervated and despoiled of efficacy, that it was, more properly speaking, become *no Gospel at all*, utterly unworthy the least pretense to the name!

Further, he denounces an *anathema!* (the highest curse!) upon any person who should dare to preach any such pretended Gospel, even though, if such a thing were possible, it should be *himself*, or an *angel* from heaven! And this denunciation he immediately repeats, lest it should be thought that he spoke rather from *warmth of temper*, than from a just sense of the importance of the case.

What would some of my readers think of a man who should, at this time, express himself in terms like these? But let it be remembered that our apostle, who was so ready with an *anathema* upon this occasion, and who, in another place, passes the same severe judgement (1 Cor. 16:22) upon any man who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ—was far from speaking thus from emotions of anger and ill-will. The disposition of his own mind, the tender concern with which he viewed the worst of sinners, may be judged of from his willingness to be made an *anathema himself* (Romans 9:3) if, by all he could suffer, he might be a means of saving the Jews, who were his worst enemies, and from whom he had constantly received the most unjust and cruel treatment!

But when the *cause of the Gospel* and *the honor of Christ* were in question—he could not, he dared not, consult with the feelings of flesh and blood; but, as the minister and messenger of the Lord, he solemnly declared what must, and will, be the awful consequence of neglecting or corrupting the Word of life!

Every faithful minister of the Gospel is possessed of a measure of the same attention to the *purity of the truth and faith* once delivered to the saints. They must not deviate from their instructions; nor can they behold with *indifference*, the specious attempts of others to mislead the unwary. They know what censures they must expect upon this account. It is sufficient for them, that they can appeal to the Searcher of hearts, that though, as the servants of Christ, *they dare not aim to please men by speaking smooth things*—yet they act from principles of benevolence and love, and would rejoice in the salvation of their greatest opposers!

The world, perhaps, would judge more favorably of these faithful ministers, if they knew more about them—if they were witnesses to the prayers and tears which they pour out for them in secret; and the emotions of mind they feel when they are constrained to declare the more solemn parts of their message. But, as ministers, and in their public work, they cannot avoid pointing out the danger of those who venture their souls and eternal hopes upon any other doctrine, than that which Paul preached.

IV. But though Paul was so tenacious of the great foundation-truths of the Gospel, and would not admit or connive at any doctrine that interfered with them, he exercised, upon all occasions—**a great tenderness to weak consciences, in matters that were not essential to the faith**, and when the scruples were owing rather to a lack of clear light—than to obstinacy. This was evident in his

conduct with regard to the great controversy that soon took place between the Jewish and Gentile converts, about the distinction of *meats* and *drinks*, and other *rituals* enjoined by the law of Moses (Romans 14:1-23); the obligation of which, many, who had been educated in the practice of those observances, did not immediately see were superseded by the Gospel of Christ. He knew and asserted his own liberty; yet, in condescension to the weakness of others—he often abridged himself of it, and declared that, rather than grieve or cause offence to a weak brother—he would eat no meat while the world stood.

His practice herein will probably be of *general application*, so long as the present state of human infirmity exists. A *defect in knowledge*, the prejudices of previous *education* and *custom*, the remains of a *legal spirit*, the influence of *great names*, and other causes of a like nature—will probably always operate, so far as to keep up *lesser differences in judgement and practice* among those who agree in the great and fundamental truths.

The enemy gains too much advantage from these things—not to increase such *differences* into *divisions*. *SELF* is too prevalent in the best men, and the tendency of *self* is—to exact submission, to hurry to extremes, to exaggerate trifles into points of great consequence, and to render us averse to the healing expedients of peace. From these sources, discords and evils innumerable have been multiplied and perpetuated among the various denominations under which the Lord's people have been ranged, which have greatly hindered the welfare and progress of the common cause, and exposed each contending party to the scorn of their real enemies.

But were the spirit and conduct of our apostle more adopted, many debates would entirely cease; and in those things where a *difference*

of judgement would still exist—the exercise of patience, gentleness, and mutual forbearance, would, perhaps, afford fairer occasion for the display of the Christian character—than if we were all exactly of one mind! Then the strong would bear the infirmities of the weak; the one would not *censure*—nor the other *despise*. Nor would those whose minds have been enlarged by a variety of experience and observation, think it at all strange, much less would they be angry, if others, who have not had the same advantages—cannot immediately enter into all their sentiments!

Paul, in knowledge, abilities, and usefulness, was eminently superior to all those among whom he chiefly conversed; and, as an apostle, he had a stronger right than any man since the apostles' day could have—to *exact* an implicit deference and submission; but he had drunk deeply of the spirit of his Master, and we are concerned to follow him, as he followed Christ, in the exercise of *tenderness to the weakest of the flock*.

It is not my present business to define what are properly *essentials in the Christian religion*, and to separate them clearly from the less important points, which, for that reason, and in contradistinction to the other, are called *secondary* points. This would lead me too far away from my topic; though, perhaps, it would not be so difficult as a person might at first expect, who should be told of all that has been written, with little satisfaction, upon the subject. I foresee a future period in our history, when a treatise of this kind will be almost necessary; and, if I am spared to reach so far, I shall probably embrace the occasion. In the mean time I would just hint an observation or two on this head, which the intelligent reader, if he thinks them just, may apply as he sees proper:

A. *Essentials* and *secondary points* in religion (if we speak with propriety) are derived from the same source, and resolved into the same authority. To consider the commands of God as essentials, and the inventions and traditions of men super-added thereto, as *secondary points*, would be a very improper, and, indeed, a very false division of the subject. Nothing but what is prescribed by the Word of God, or may be fairly deduced from it—is worthy of the name even of a *secondary point* in true religion. *Human appointments*, if not repugnant to Scripture and the light of conscience, may be submitted to for the sake of peace, or when the general purposes of edification cannot be attained without them; but they seem not to deserve a place even among the *secondary points* of a religion which is of divine institution. All the labored arguments, whether for or against the color of a garment, the shape of a building, and a multitude of other things equally insignificant, seem to have occasioned a needless loss of time and temper, chiefly by a mistake of the question on both sides!

B. *Essentials* in Christianity are those things without which no man can be a Christian in the sight of God, and by the decision of his Word. And, on the other hand, those things alone are essential, which whoever possesses, is, by Scripture declaration, in a state of favor with God through Christ. These might be branched out into many particulars; but they are fully and surely comprised in two—*faith* and *holiness*. These are essential to the being of a Christian; are only to be found in a Christian; are infallible tokens that the possessor is accepted in the Beloved; and whoever dies without them must assuredly perish. These are *essentials*, because they are *absolutely necessary*; for it is written, "Whoever does not *believe*—shall be damned," (Mark 16:16) and, "Without *holiness*—no man shall see the Lord," (Hebrews 12:14)

And they are essential likewise, because they *demonstrate* and *evidence*—a saving interest in the promise of everlasting life. Thus our Lord declares, "I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and *believes* Him who sent Me, has eternal life and will not come under judgment—but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24) And the apostle, writing to the believing Romans, tells them, "But now, since you have been liberated from sin and become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in *holiness*—*and* the end is eternal life!" (Romans 6:22)

These, then, are the *essentials* of religion; and though they are produced by the same power of the Holy Spirit, and derived from a knowledge of the same truths, and therefore cannot be separated, they may properly be distinguished—for the conviction of those who pretend to *one* without the other. The most specious appearances of holiness, which are not accompanied with faith in Christ, may be safely rejected as counterfeits! On the other hand, a profession of faith which is not *evidenced* by the fruits of holiness, by gracious tempers, and a tenor of life befitting the Gospel—is dead, deluding, and destructive!

If the question is removed another step, and it should be asked, "which, or how many, of the doctrines of Scripture are necessary to produce the faith and holiness supposed requisite?" It may suffice to say, that, in the nature of things, no person can be expected to believe in Christ, until convinced of his need of him, and of his ability, as a Savior, fully to answer his expectations. And as a *supreme love to God*, and a *hatred of all sin*—are evidently included in the idea of *holiness*, it supposes a disposition of mind which every man's experience proves to be beyond the power of fallen human nature. And therefore a competent knowledge and cordial acceptance of what the Scripture teaches concerning the nature and desert of

sin; the person and mediatory acts of Christ; the causes, ends, and effects of his mediation; together with the necessity of that *change of heart* which is expressed by a being *born again*—appear to be essentially necessary to that faith and holiness which are described in the Gospel.

C. The *secondary points* of religion include all those particulars of revelation which a person, possessed of the above-mentioned essentials, may as yet be unacquainted with, or unable to judge of with certainty. A careful application to the Scripture, a diligent waiting upon God in prayer, and an improvement of the means of grace—will, by the divine blessing, which is promised to those who seek in this manner—increase our light, comprehension, and certainty, with regard to these points; which, though not essentially necessary to the *being* of a Christian, are exceedingly conducive to his *well-being*, to his growth and establishment in the truth.

This subject may be, perhaps, illustrated from the physical body, in which what we call the *vital parts* may be considered as essential to life, because there can be no life without them. We may easily conceive that a man may live without an arm or leg, or several members and organs, which, though highly valuable for use and comfort, are not necessarily connected with life. But if we conceive of him as deprived of his head, heart, or lungs—we can no longer consider him as *living*. Yet it is desirable to have a body not only barely alive—but thriving.

Just so in true religion: those who are truly partakers of it, will not too curiously inquire—how much *knowledge*, or what degree of *practice*—is *barely consistent* with a possibility of life. But they will earnestly desire to be acquainted with the whole will of God, and that every part of it may have a suitable influence upon their practice.

But, in the mean time, a consolation is provided, in the promises of God made to those who have received the *seeds of faith and true holiness*, against the fears, doubts, and involuntary mistakes which, from remaining ignorance, they are yet subject to. God will supply what is lacking, pardon what is amiss, and lead them on from strength to strength. They are to walk by the light already afforded, to wait on him for an increase, to be wary of themselves, and gentle to others. And things which as yet they do not understand, God will, in his due time, reveal to them. But to return from this digression.

5. Every part of Paul's history and writings demonstrates **an unselfish spirit, and that his uncommon labors were directed to no other ends than the glory of God and the good of men.** No man had, probably, so great an influence over his hearers, or could have a juster claim, from the nature and number of his services, to a suitable *provision* for himself. But he could say, with truth, "I will not burden you, for I am not seeking what you have—but you!" To cut off all occasions of misapprehension on this head, he usually submitted to *work with his own hands* rather than be dependent on his friends. It is true, he does not propose himself to us as a *pattern* in this respect, for he tells us that "the laborer is worthy of his hire," and that "the Lord had ordained that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel." (1 Cor. 9:14) And when he saw it expedient, he did not refuse to be himself assisted by others. He showed, by accepting such assistance from some, that he understood his liberty, and did not act from a spirit of pride or singularity when he declined it. And by his more *general* practice, he evidenced that he was superior to all *selfish* and *mercenary* motives; and, upon the whole, he was content to appear and live as a poor man. And though he had learned in the school of Christ, how to abound, as well as to suffer poverty, the latter seems to have been more frequently his lot. (Phi. 4:12)

He saw too many false teachers, who, under the sanction of a *minister*, made merchandise of souls, and he not only severely censured them—but by this self-denial, which they were unable to imitate—he manifested the vanity of their pretenses in setting themselves forth as the apostles of Christ. This seems to have been his chief design in it, and the reason of his repeating, with so much earnestness, his determination to take nothing from the Corinthians, who were too much inclined to listen to some of these teachers, to his disadvantage. But whatever *parade* they might make of gifts or zeal, or however they might presume to equal themselves to him in other respects; he knew they would not attempt to share with him—in the *glory of preaching the Gospel freely*, which was diametrically inconsistent with their whole design!

The circumstances with us are so far different, that, in proposing Paul as a *pattern of unselfishness*, we do not lay a stress upon his preaching the Gospel without expense to his hearers. Yet, in his *noble contempt of worldly advantage*, and making everything stoop to the great ends of his mission—he stands as a *precedent* to all Christian ministers in succeeding times! In those passages of his epistles to Timothy and Titus, where the negative part of a minister's character is given, this is constantly one branch of it, that *he must not be influenced by a love of gain*; and as constantly the word is compounded with the epithet, *filthy*—"not given to *filthy* lucre;" to intimate that nothing can be more dishonest or dishonorable, than to enter the Christian ministry for mercenary reasons! Nor is this the judgement of Scripture only—but the general voice of mankind.

Nothing is a greater bar to a minister's usefulness, or renders his person and labors more contemptible, than a known *attachment to money*, a grasping fist, and a hard heart! Those who enter into the pastor's office for filthy lucre, who are less concerned for the *flock*—

than their *fleece*, who employ all their arts and influence to exchange a lesser benefit for a greater, or to superadd one benefit to another—may obtain the reward they seek! But of all the methods of acquiring wealth, which do not directly expose a man to the lash of human laws—this is the most to be lamented and avoided!

If the Scriptures are true; if Paul was a servant of Christ; and if the authority of his precepts and example is still binding—a day will come when *mercenary preachers* will wish they had begged their bread from door to door, or been chained as slaves to the oar of a galley for life—rather than have presumed to intrude into the church upon such base and unworthy motives! It is to be feared that too many read the awful denunciations upon this head, in the prophets Jeremiah (23:1-40) and Ezekiel, (13:1-23; 34:1-31) with indifference, as supposing they only relate to the Jews who lived at that time. But they are equally applicable to all who prostitute the Word and worship of God—to the purposes of *ambition* and *avarice*!

6. From the foregoing particulars we may collect the idea of **true Christian zeal**, as exemplified in our apostle. Hardly any word in our language is more misunderstood or abused, than *zeal*. It is used in the New Testament in both a good or bad sense—and it is considered as a vice or virtue, according to its object and principle.

In the BAD sense—it sometimes denotes envy, indignation, or disdain, an obstinate and ignorant opposition to the truth, a misguided warmth in unnecessary things, and a contentious, disputatious temper. A zeal replete with these traits has too frequently been the bane and opprobrium of the Christian church!

But, "It is GOOD to be to be zealous, provided the purpose is good," (Galatians 4:17) and then it is sinful to be otherwise. Our passions were not given us in vain. When the judgement is well informed, and

the understanding duly enlightened by the Word of God: the more *warmth*—the better.

But this warmth and earnestness, in an ignorant or prejudiced person, is *dangerous* and *hurtful* to himself and others! It is like haste in a man in the dark, who knows not where he is going, nor what harms he may suffer by his haste. *False zeal* spends its strength in defense of *names* and *forms*, the *externals* of religion, or the *inventions of men*! *False zeal* enforces its edicts by compulsion and severity! *False zeal* would willingly call for fire from heaven; but, unable to do this, it kindles the flame of persecution, and, if not providentially restrained, wages war with the peace, comfort, and liberty of all who disdain to wear its chains; and breathes threatening, slaughter, and destruction with an unrelenting spirit! The mildest weapons (which *false zeal* never employs alone, except where it is checked by a superior power)—are calumny, contempt, and hatred. And the *objects* it seeks to harm are generally the quiet in the land, and those who worship God in spirit and in truth. In a word *false zeal* resembles the craft by which it works—and is earthly, sensual, devilish.

But the *true Christian zeal* is a heavenly gentle flame. It shines and warms—but knows not to destroy. It is the spirit of Christ, infused with a sense of his love into the heart. It is a generous philanthropy and benevolence, which, like the light of the sun, diffuses itself to every object, and longs to be the instrument of good, if possible, to the whole race of mankind. A sense of the worth of souls, the importance of unseen and eternal realities, and the dreadful condition of unawakened sinners—makes it, indeed, earnest and importunate; but this it shows—not by bitterness and constraint—but by an unwearied perseverance in attempting to overcome evil with good. It returns blessings for curses, prayers for harsh

treatment, and, though often reviled and affronted, cannot be discouraged from renewed efforts to make others partakers of the happiness itself possesses. It knows how to express a befitting indignation against the *errors* and *follies* of men; but towards their *persons*—it is all *gentleness* and *compassion*. It weeps (and would, if possible, weep tears of blood) over those who will not be persuaded. But, while it plainly represents the consequences of their obstinacy, it *trembles* at its own declarations, and *feels* for those who cannot feel for themselves.

True Christian zeal is often grieved—but cannot be provoked. The zealous Christian is strictly observant of his own failings, candid and tender to the faults of others; he knows what allowances are due to the *frailty* of human nature, and the *temptations* of the present state, and willingly makes all the allowances possible. And though he dares not call *evil* good, cannot but judge according to the rule of the Scripture—yet he will conceal the *infirmities* of men as much as he can. He will not speak of them without just cause, much less will he aggravate their case; or boast himself over them!

Such was the zeal of our apostle: bold and intrepid in the cause of God and truth, unwearied in service, inflexible in danger. When duty called, he was not to be restrained either by the *threats* of enemies, the *solicitations* of friends, or the prospect of any *hardships* to which he might be exposed. He cheerfully endured hunger and thirst, watching and weariness, poverty and contempt, and counted not his life dear—so that he might fulfill the great purposes of the ministry which he had received of the Lord.

But at the same time, in all his interaction with men—he was gentle, mild, and compassionate. He pursued the peace, and accommodated himself to the weakness, of all about him. When he might command

—he used entreaties. When he met with harsh and injurious treatment—he bore it patiently, and, if opportunity offered, requited it with kindness. Thus as he had drunk of the spirit of Jesus—so he walked in the steps of his Lord and Master.

All who bear the name of ministers of Christ, would do well to examine how far their *tempers* and *conduct* are conformable to Paul's. Are there not too many who widely differ from him? Where he was *immovable* as an iron pillar—they are *flexible* and *yielding* as a reed waving in the wind, suiting their doctrines and practice to the depraved taste of the world, and prostituting their talents and calling to the unworthy pursuit of selfish ambition and applause!

On the other hand, in things less essential, or not commanded, they invade the rights of the private judgement of others, and attempt to bind heavy yokes and impositions upon those whom Christ has made free. And while they readily tolerate (if not countenance) false doctrine and immorality—they exert all their strength and subtlety to disquiet or suppress those who differ from them in the slightest issue, if they profess to differ for conscience' sake. *But Jesus has no such 'ministers'!* their claim is utterly vain! None but those who are ignorant of the plainest truths can allow them this character; their tempers, their behavior, the tenor of their professed instructions, and the total lack of efficacy and influence in their ministrations, plainly demonstrate that Christ neither sent them nor owns them!

7. Having considered the subject-matter and the leading views of the apostle's **ministry**—it may be proper to take some notice of his **manner as a preacher**. This he reminds the Corinthians of. They were reputed as an educated and clever people. Paul was aware of their character, and expresses himself as if he had been deliberating before he saw them, in what way he would address them with the

fairest probability of success. He tells them, (1 Cor. 2:1-4) that he determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ, and him crucified; including, in this one comprehensive expression, the whole scheme of Gospel doctrine.

And as to the **manner** in which he delivered this doctrine, he says, "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom—but in demonstration of the Spirit and with power." We are sure that he did not renounce *justness of reasoning*, or *propriety of expression*. In these respects he exceeded their most admired orators, as may appear to any who have skill to compare his epistles and discourses with the best performances of the Greek writers. But he renounced "the enticing," or plausible, "words of man's wisdom." In the term "man's wisdom," may be included— whatever the natural faculties of man are capable of discovering or receiving, independent of the peculiar teaching of the Spirit of God. "Enticing words of man's wisdom" may include all those ways and arts which the wise men of the world have used, or approved, as most effectual to express, adorn, or defend their own wise sentiments and discoveries. These, and the methods of setting them off to advantage, have been divided into many branches, and dignified with high sounding names.

But all the efforts of man's wisdom, considered as engaged in the subjects of religion, may be summed up in three particulars:

A. A vain inquiry into things which lie wholly beyond the capacity of man in his present state, and which can only be discovered by supernatural revelation.

B. A vain attempt to account for everything according to the light and principles of depraved reason.

C. A studious exactness in language, either an easy flow of words to please and amuse the ear, or a torrent of strong and figurative expressions to engage the passions, according as a different taste or fashion happens to prevail.

It would be too dry a task to illustrate these points, by adducing specimens of each from the works of the ancient and modern philosophers; but if we had no other employment in hand, it would be easy to show that *man's wisdom*, in the first sense, is *Uncertainty*; in the second, *Prejudice*; in the third, *Imposition* and *artifice*. It is sufficient for my present purpose, that the apostle renounced them all.

Instead of *vain conjectures*, he spoke from *certain experience*; he could say, "I received of the Lord, that which I also delivered to you." Instead of *accommodating his doctrine to the taste and judgement of his hearers*—he spoke with authority, in the name of God whom he served. Instead of losing time in measuring words and syllables, that he might obtain the *reputation of a fine speaker*—he spoke, from the feeling and fullness of his heart, the words of simplicity and truth! The success of his preaching did not at all depend upon the softness and harmony of his words, and therefore he disdained an attention to those *petty ornaments of speech*, which were quite necessary to help out the poverty of "man's wisdom".

He sought something else, which those who preach *themselves* rather than Christ Jesus the Lord, have little reason to expect. I mean, the *power and demonstration of the Spirit*. He knew that this alone could give him success!

Ministers may learn from him, what to *avoid* and what to *seek* for—if they would be useful to their hearers. Men can but *declare* the truths of the Gospel; it is the Spirit of God who alone can *reveal* them with

power, to the heart of the listener. Nothing less than a *divine power* can present them to the mind in their just importance, and throw light into the soul by which they may be perceived! Nothing less than this power can subdue the will, and open the heart to receive the truth in the love of it. Without this divine power—even Paul would have preached in vain!

From what has been said, we may remark two obvious reasons, among others, why we have so much unsuccessful preaching in our days: either the Gospel *truths* are given up, or the Gospel *simplicity* departed from. Where either of these is the case, the Lord refuses his power and blessing.

8. Another observable part of Paul's character, is **his sincere humility**. In the midst of his eminent and extensive services, he retained a deep sense of the evil part he once acted against the Lord. He speaks of himself, on this account, in the most abasing language, as the chief of sinners, and strongly expresses his unworthiness of the grace and apostleship he had received. And though his insight into the mysteries of the Gospel, the communion he maintained with God by faith in His Son, and the beauty of holiness which shone in his life, were all beyond the common measure—yet having, in the same proportion, a clearer sense of his obligations, and of the extent and purity of the divine precepts—he thought nothing of his present attainments, in comparison of those greater degrees of grace he was still pressing after. While, in the eyes of others, he appeared not only exemplary—but unequaled, he esteemed himself less than the least of all the saints; (Ephesians 3:8) and his patience and condescension towards others, and his acquiescence under all the trying dispensations of providence with which he was exercised—were a proof that this was not an *pretended manner of expression*—but the *genuine* dictate of his heart!

To *speak* of one's self in abasing terms is easy—and such language is often a thin veil, through which the *motions of pride* may be easily discerned. But though the *language* of humility may be counterfeited, its *real fruits* and acting's are inimitable. Here again, Paul is a pattern for Christians.

A humble frame of mind is the strength and ornament of every other grace, and the proper soil wherein they grow! A proud Christian, that is, one who has a high conceit of his own abilities and attainments, is no less a contradiction, than a *sober drunkard*, or a *generous miser*. All other *seeming* excellencies are of no real value, unless accompanied with humility. And though a person should appear to have little more than a consciousness of his own insufficiency, and a teachable dependent spirit, and is waiting upon the Lord, in his appointed way, for instruction and a blessing, he will infallibly thrive as a tree planted by the waterside; for God, who resists the proud, has promised to give grace to the humble. (James 4:6)

But, in an especial manner, humility is *necessary* and *beautiful* in a minister! The *greatest abilities* and the *most unwearied diligence* will not ensure success without it! A secret apprehension of his own importance, will deprive him of the Holy Spirit's assistance, without which he can do nothing! "His arm will be dried up, and his right eye will be darkened;" (Zec. 11:17) for the Lord Almighty has purposed to stain the pride of all human glory, and will honor none but those who abase themselves, and are willing to give all the praise to him alone!

If any man had ground to set a value upon his knowledge, gifts, and services—Paul might justly claim the pre-eminence. But though he was an apostle, and an inspired writer, though he had planted churches through a considerable part of the known world, though he

was received as an angel by many to whom he preached; and, by a special blessing, had been caught up into the third heaven; yet he was, by grace, preserved from being exalted above measure—or from assuming an undue superiority over his brethren. The *authority* with which he was entrusted, he employed solely to *their* advantage, and accounted himself the *least* of all, and the *servant* of all. How very opposite has been the conduct of many since his time—who have aimed to appropriate the glory exclusively to themselves!

Such was our apostle, and the same spirit (though in an inferior degree) will be found in all the faithful ministers of the Lord Jesus! They love his name; it is the pleasing theme of their ministry, and to render it glorious in the eyes of sinners is the great study of their lives. For his sake they love all who love him, and are their willing servants to promote the comfort and edification of their souls. They love his Gospel, faithfully proclaim it, without disguise or alteration, and shun not to declare the whole counsel of God, so far as they are themselves acquainted with it. They contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; and are desirous to preserve and maintain the truth, in its power and purity. The knowledge of their own weakness and fallibility makes them tender to the weaknesses of others. And though they dare not lay, or allow, any other foundation than that which God has laid in Zion—yet, knowing that the kingdom of God does not consist in foods and drinks—but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—they guard against the influence of a *party spirit*. And, if their labors are confined to Christians of one denomination, their love and prayers are not limited within such narrow bounds—but extend to all who love and serve their Master.

They have entered upon the ministry, not for selfish and sordid ends—for popular applause, or filthy lucre—but from a constraining sense of the love of Jesus, and a just regard to the worth and danger of

immortal souls! Their zeal is conducted and modeled by the example and precepts of their Lord; their desire is not to destroy—but to save; and they wish their greatest enemies a participation in their choicest blessings.

In the subject-matter and the manner of their preaching, they show that they seek not to be men-pleasers—but to commend the truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And when they have done their utmost, and when God has blessed their labors, and given them acceptance and success beyond their hopes, they are conscious of the defects and evils attending their best endeavors, of the weak influence the truths they preach to others have upon their own hearts; that their sufficiency of every kind is of God, and not of themselves; and therefore they sit down, ashamed, as unprofitable servants, and can rejoice or glory in nothing but in him who came into the world to save the chief of sinners!

It might be expected that a spirit and conduct thus uniformly benevolent and unselfish, and witnessed to, in a greater or less degree, by the good effect of their ministry and example among their hearers, would secure them the good-will of mankind, and entitle them to *peace*, if not to *respect*. But, on the contrary, these are the very people who are represented as *deceivers of souls*, and *disturbers of society*; they are not permitted to live in some places; and it is owing to a concurrence of favorable circumstances if they are permitted to speak in any. The eyes of many are upon them, watching for their halting; their *infirmities* are aggravated, their *words* twisted, their *endeavors* counteracted, and their *persons* despised.

The design of our history is to show, in the course of every period of the church, that those who have approached nearest to the character

I have attempted to delineate from Paul, have always met with such treatment. From his declaration, that "all who live godly in Christ Jesus *shall* suffer persecution," (2 Timothy 3:12) we may expect it *shall* always be so—while human nature and the state of the world remain as they are. However, it may be a consolation to those who suffer for righteousness sake, to reflect, that the apostles were thus treated before them; particularly Paul, who, as he *labored* more abundantly than the rest—so he *suffered* more abundantly than the rest. His person was treated with contempt and despite, his character traduced, his doctrine misrepresented. And though his natural and acquired abilities were great, and he spoke with power and the demonstration of the Spirit—yet he was reckoned as "a babbling," and "a madman," and "the scum of the earth, and the refuse of the world!"

"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—*put it into practice*. And the God of peace will be with you."
Philippians 4:9

Four Letters on 'Denominations' and Forms of 'Church Government'

Letter 1

My dear friend and brother,
You have more than once gently called upon me for the reasons which induced me to exercise my ministry as a Clergyman of the *Church of England*, rather than among the *Dissenters*, where my first religious connections were formed, and with many of whom I still maintain a cordial friendship. Hitherto I have usually waived the

subject, and contented myself with assuring you, in general terms, that, as the preference I gave to the *Establishment* was the result of serious and, I trust, impartial inquiry, so that I had never seen reason to repent of it, no, not for a minute, since the day of my ordination. I now purpose to give you a more particular answer: and, as you are not the only person who has expressed a *friendly surprise* at my choice, I shall communicate my reasons from the *press*, that all my fiends who have been at a loss to account for my conduct, may have such satisfaction as it is in my power to give them. I shall, however, keep you particularly in my eye while I write, that a just sense of the candor and affection with which you have always treated me, may regulate my pen, and preserve me (if possible) from that harsh and angry spirit, into which writers upon *controversial points* are too often betrayed.

I confess, that, as in this business *my conscience is clear* in the sight of Him to whom alone I am properly accountable, I would wish still to continue silent, and submit to be a little misunderstood by some people whose good opinion I prize—rather than trouble the public with what more immediately relates to myself. But something upon this subject seems expedient in the present day; not so much by way of apology for one or a few individuals, as with a view of obviating prejudices, and preventing, or at least abating, the unhappy effects of a party-spirit.

There was a time when the *non-conformists* groaned under the *iron rod of oppression* and were exposed to fines, penalties, and imprisonment, as well as to cruel mocking, and the lawless rage of a rabble—for worshiping God according to the light of their consciences! The greater part of the non-conformist ministers of that day were the light and glory of the land. They were men full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, penetrated with a deep sense of the

Redeemer's glory and love, and of the worth of souls. Their ministrations were accompanied with unction and power, and they were instrumental in turning many sinners from their evil ways. It is no wonder that the *world* hated such men; that snares were spread for their feet, their liberty abridged, and that many said, "*Away with them, they are not worthy to live!*"

It is probable, that, if these servants of the Most High could have enjoyed that freedom for their persons and assemblies, which, in answer to their prayers, is now possessed by those who bear the same name, they would have been well satisfied that the established church should have remained in peaceful possession of its own order and ritual. And several among them, not the lowest in repute for wisdom and piety, continued long to worship occasionally in the *parish churches*, after the *non-conformist* preachers had been ejected from them. But things were studiously carried against them with a high hand. The exaction of re-ordination, and the little time allowed for subscribing the Book of Common Prayer, which many of the ministers had not been able to procure when the law called for their assent to it, were two circumstances which greatly contributed to swell the *Bartholomew list*. It was well known to some of the leaders in that unhappy business, that there were among the non-conformists, wise and moderate men, who were not disposed to leave their parochial churches, unless they were constrained by the harshest and most violent measures; such, therefore, were the measures they adopted.

It is our mercy to live in more quiet times. We are on all sides freed from restraints in religious concerns; and every person is at liberty to profess, preach, worship, or print—as he thinks proper. But it is still to be lamented, that those who are united upon the same foundational truths, and agree in the same important leading

principles, should lay so much stress upon their *secondary differences* in sentiment, as to prevent the exercise of mutual love and forbearance; and that, instead of laboring in concert, within their respective departments, to promote the common cause, they should strive to vex and worry each other with needless disputation, and uncharitable censures!

I hope, among us, the *High Church principles*, which formerly produced unjustifiable and oppressive effects, are now generally exploded. But may we not lay a claim, in our turn, to that moderation, candor, and tenderness, from our dissenting brethren, which we cheerfully exercise towards them? But, as we (I think) are no longer the aggressors, so they seem no longer content to stand upon the defensive. We wish to join them with heart and hand, in supporting and spreading the great truths of the gospel; and such as you, my friend, approve our aims, and rejoice with us, if God is pleased to give us success.

But there are those among you, whose persons and general conduct we respect, from whom we do not find equal returns of good-will, because we cannot join with them in the support of a group which bears the name of the *Dissenting Interest*. I know not whether this phrase was in use a hundred years ago; but, were I to meet with it as referring to that period, I would understand by it little more or less than the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom. At present, when I consider the various names, views, and sentiments, which obtain among those who form this aggregate, styled the Dissenting Interest, I am at a loss what sense to put upon the term. May I not say, without offence, that it is at least a very heterogeneous body? May I not hope, without presumption, that though you and I are not agreed on the subject of church government, yet I am related to you by a

much nearer and stronger tie than that which binds you to the Dissenting Interest?

I confess, that so far as it is the interest of those who depreciate the person and blood of the Savior, and deny the agency and influence of the Holy Spirit, or the total depravity of fallen man, so far I cannot (in a Christian view) be a friend to it. On the other hand, so far as it regards those who love, avow, and preach the doctrines, experience, and practice, which both you and I include in our idea of *the Gospel*, so far I can truly say, though not a Dissenter myself, the Dissenting Interest is dear to my heart, and has a share in my daily prayers. And in this, I am persuaded, I speak the sentiments of many, both ministers and laymen, in the establishment.

We are sorry, therefore, (at least I am sorry,) though not angry, when books are written, or declarations (perhaps in the most solemn occasions of worship) [some of the Letters were written in the year 1777.] unseasonably made, which seem not so much designed to confirm Dissenters in their own principles, as to place those who cannot accede to them in an unfavorable light; the ministers, especially, who, according to some representations, must be supposed to be almost destitute of common sense, or else of common honesty!

When I write a letter, especially to a friend, I think myself released from that attention to *method* which I might observe if I was composing a treatise. As my heart dictates—my pen moves. I therefore hope you will bear with me if I do not come directly to what I proposed; which was to give you some account of the motives of my own conduct. It may not be improper to premise a few preliminary observations. I shall not weary you by attempting to justify everything that obtains in our way, nor call your attention to all the

minutiae which might furnish subject for debate to those who know not how to employ their time better. It would be mere trifling to dispute for or against a *surplice* or a *band*, a *gown* or a *cloak*; or to inquire whether it is the size, or the shape, which renders some of these habiliments more or less suitable for a minister, than the others. But, perhaps, a few strictures upon establishments and liturgies may not be wholly impertinent to my design.

That national religious establishments, under the New Testament dispensation, are neither of express divine appointment, nor formed in all points upon a Scriptural plan, I readily admit. Whether upon this account they cannot be submitted to without violating the obedience we owe to the Lord Jesus, as Head and Lawgiver of his church, I shall consider hereafter. At present, permit me only to hope, (for my own sake,) that *such submission is not absolutely sinful*; and in that view, to offer a word in favor of their expedience.

I plead not for this or that establishment, or the administration of one preferably to another; but chiefly for that circumstance which I suppose is common to them all, I mean, the parceling out a country, the government of which is professedly Christian, into certain *districts*, analogous to what we call *parishes*, and fixing in each of those districts, a person with a ministerial character, who by his office is engaged to promote the good of souls within the limits of his own boundary. I think the number of *parishes* in England and Wales is computed to be not much fewer than ten thousand.

The number of *dissenting* churches and congregations in England and Wales, (if those whom I have consulted as the most competent judges are not mistaken,) will not be found greatly to exceed one thousand. In how many, or in how few of these, the *old puritan gospel* (if I may so call it) is preached or prized—I deem you a better

judge than myself. It is certain, that the number of dissenting ministers who are very willing that it should be publicly known that they differ widely from the sentiments of their forefathers, is not small. However, we will take them all into the estimate.

Now let us for a moment suppose the *establishment*, with all its provisions, removed and annihilated. In this case some of the dissenting ministers might indeed change their situations, and fix in places where they might hope for more extensive influence; but, as none of them could be in two places at once, about nine-tenths of the kingdom would be deprived, at a single stroke, of the very form of public religion, and reduced, in a short time, (for any relief the Dissenting Interest could afford,) to a state little better than Heathenism. That there is any regard paid to the Lord's day through the greater part of the land, that the holy Scriptures are publicly read to thousands, who, probably, would otherwise know no more of the Bible than they do of the Koran—are good effects of the national establishment, which, I think, can hardly be denied, even by those who are most displeased with it.

For this reason, if I could not conform to the Establishment myself, I think I would speak respectfully of it, and bless God for it. Some *established* form of religious profession, with a full and free toleration for all who think they can serve God more acceptably upon a different plan—appears to me the most desirable and promising constitution, for preserving the rights of conscience, and for promoting the welfare of souls. I believe, therefore, that the *Church of England*, as by law established, (for it claims no higher title,) though it be not a perfect institution, and notwithstanding its real or supposed defects, and the faults of individuals within its community, has been, upon the whole, and will be, a blessing to the nation; and

that its preservation is an effect of the wise and gracious providence of the Great Head of the Church Universal.

From the expediency of *parochial order*, I would farther deduce the expediency of a *rubric* and *liturgy*. For I cannot conceive of an established church, without including in my idea some *determinate rule or line* respecting doctrine and worship, by which it is discriminated from other churches which are not so established. As to our liturgy, I am far from thinking it incapable of amendment; though, when I consider the temper and spirit of the present times, I dare not wish that the improvement of it should be attempted, lest the intended *remedy* might prove worse than the *disease!* As I am not called to defend it, I shall only say, what I believe will be allowed by many candid people on your side, that that the general strain of it is Scriptural, evangelical, and experimental. It recognizes with precision, the One Great Object of Worship, in his personal distinctions and glorious attributes, the honors and offices of the Redeemer, the power and agency of the Holy Spirit, the evil of sin, the depravity of man, and all the distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel. As to the composition, I question if anything in the English language (the Bible excepted) is worthy of being compared with it for simplicity, perspicuity, energy, and comprehensive fullness of expression.

But I suppose the objection does not lie so much against our liturgy, in *particular*, as in general against the *use of liturgies of any kind*. And, for ought I know, if the compilers of our liturgy could have expected, that all the parishes in the kingdom, and from age to age, would be supplied with ministers competently acquainted with the mysteries of the Gospel, and possessed of the spirit of grace and supplication, they might have left them under less restraint in conducting public worship. I believe many of the Dissenters take it

for granted, that a considerable part of our clergy are not only unable to pray in public, to the edification of their hearers, without a form—but are unfit for the ministerial office in every view. Should this be true, it is a truth which, I hope, would excite *lamentation*, rather than *ridicule* or *invective*, in all who profess a regard for the glory of God, or love to the souls of men.

But, upon this supposition, I would think an evangelical liturgy a great blessing; as it must secure the people (that is, the bulk of the nation) from being exposed to the same uncertainty and disappointment from our *reading desks*, as they are liable to from the pulpit. For they who cannot, or do not, preach the Gospel, are not likely to pray agreeably to the spirit of the Gospel, if that part of the public service was likewise left to their own management. Or shall we say, it is an advantage to some dissenting congregations that, their ministers not being confined to a form of sound words, there is little more of Christ or of grace to be found in their prayers than in their sermons?

Is it not too hastily taken for granted by many, that God cannot be worshiped in spirit and in truth by those who use a form of prayer? or that he will not afford those who so approach him, any testimony of his acceptance? If the *words of a form* suit and express the desires and feelings of my mind, the prayer is as much my own as if I had conceived it upon the spot. On the other hand, if I have the greatest readiness and fluency in diversifying expressions, so that my prayer should always appear unstudied and new; yet, if my spirit, or the spirit of those who join with me, are not engaged in it, though I may admire my own performance, and be applauded by others—it is no better than a *mere lifeless form* in the sight of Him who searches the heart. Not to say, that many who profess to pray *extempore*, that is, without either a printed or a written form—go so much in a *beaten*

path, that they who hear them frequently can tell, with tolerable certainty, how they will begin, when they are about the middle, and when they are drawing towards the close of their prayer.

It is said, that a prescribed form precludes the exercise of a gift in prayer; which is true: but then, as I hinted before, it in some good measure supplies the lack of such a gift; and, blessed be the Lord, there are many living witnesses who can declare, to his praise, that a form does not restrain, much less preclude, the exercise of grace. They know, and are sure, that their Lord and Master owns and comforts them in what their brethren hastily condemn them for. It is well for us, that God sees not as man sees, and is no more a respecter of parties than of persons.

It cannot be denied that the Lord himself appointed forms of prayer and praise to be used in the Old Testament church. When the ark set forward, and when it rested, Moses addressed the Lord, not according to the varied emotions of his own spirit—but statedly in the same determinate expressions, Num. 10:35-36. So likewise in the solemn benediction which the high-priest was to pronounce upon the people, Num. 6:23-27. Again, at the presenting of the first fruits, though the heart of the officer might be filled with gratitude, He was not to express it in his own way—but the Lord himself prescribed the *form* of his acknowledgment, confession, and prayer. Deu. 26:12-15. But it may be said, these were enjoined under the Levitical institution, which is now abrogated, and that we live under a dispensation of greater light and liberty. I wish, however, with all our light and liberty, we could more fully come up to the spirit of some of the devotional parts of the Old Testament, which were recorded for our instruction, and most certainly are not abrogated.

The Book of Psalms, especially, contains a rich variety of *patterns* for prayer, if we may not call them *forms*, adapted to all the various exercises of the life of faith. And if, when I read or repeat such Psalms as the sixty-third, eighty-fourth, or eighty-sixth, I could feel, in the manner I wish, the force of every expression, I should think I prayed to good purpose, though I were not to intermingle a single word of my own.

So likewise with respect to that summary which *our Lord* condescended to teach his disciples; though, I believe, it had a peculiar reference to the state in which they were before his passion, and while he was still with them; yet, agreeably to the fullness of his wisdom, it is so comprehensive, that, I apprehend, every part of a believer's fellowship with God in prayer, may be reduced, without forcing, to one or the other of the heads of this prayer. And I should esteem it a golden hour indeed, one of the happiest seasons I ever enjoyed in prayer, if I could repeat it with a just impression of the meaning of every clause! But, alas! such are the effects of our unhappy differences, or rather of a wrongness of spirit in maintaining them; and so prone are we to think we cannot be too unlike those whom we are not pleased with, that even the words which our Lord himself has taught us are depreciated and disused by many, I fear, upon no better ground than because they are retained in the usage of the Church of England! Though, besides, giving us a *pattern* to pray after that manner, He has, at least, permitted us to use it as a *form*, directing us, when we pray, to say, "Our Father who are in heaven," etc. If Scriptural warrant be required, I think we have one more clear and express for the use of this prayer than can be found for some things upon which no small stress is laid by our dissenting brethren.

Some people might possibly allege, that, if the use of *Scriptural* forms of prayer were admitted, it would plead nothing in favor of such forms as are of *human* composition. But, as I believe the more judicious part of the Dissenters would not make this distinction, a few words may suffice for an answer. Most of us, when we preach, profess to *preach the Word of God*; and, I think, we are sufficiently authorized to use the expression, so far as our sermons are explanatory of Scriptural truths, and agreeable to them. For, though the system of truth contained in the holy Scriptures has a peculiar authority, as the fountain from whence we are to derive our public discourses, and the standard by which they are to be tried—yet truth, as to its nature, does not admit of degrees; but all propositions, if they are true, must be equally true; and every conclusion which is rightly inferred from Scriptural premises, must be, in whatever words it is expressed, (if they are precise and clear,) as true as the premises from which it is drawn. If I give a just definition or explication of a doctrine of the Bible in my own words, the truth or importance of that doctrine are not affected or weakened by the vehicle in which I convey it; nor would a hearer have a right to withhold his attention or assent, from a pretense that, though the proposition itself was true, he was not concerned in it, because I had not expressed it in Scriptural phrases. It is only upon this ground that the propriety and authority of preaching can be maintained; and the like reasoning may be applied to prayer. *A prayer is Scriptural, if conformable to the promises, patterns, and truths of Scripture, though it should not contain one phrase taken verbatim from the Bible!*

May I not here appeal to the practice of the Dissenters themselves? I suppose, Dr. Watts's Hymns, and his imitation of David's Psalms, especially the latter, are used by a large majority of dissenting congregations in their public worship. Many of these pieces are

devotional; that is, they are in the strain of prayer, or praise. They are, therefore, forms of prayer or praise; and when the first line is given out, it is probable that several people in the assembly know before-hand every word they are to sing. In some congregations the psalm or hymn is delivered line by line; and in most, the bulk of the people are provided with books. Now, it appears to me, that, when a worshiper, who attends to what is going forward, and is not content with a mere lip-service, joins in singing verses, which express the desires and petitions of his heart to the Lord, he prays; and, if he uses verses with which he was before acquainted, he *prays by a form*; he does the very thing for which we are condemned! Unless it can be proved that the fault and evil, which is essential to a form in *prose*, is entirely removed, if the substance of the obnoxious form be expressed in metre and chime.

I have heard of a minister who used to compose hymns in the pulpit. It was his custom to give out one line; and by the time the congregation had sung the first, he had a second ready for them, and so on, as long as he thought proper to sing. These were not forms; they were composed on the spot. Before he had finished a second stanza, the former (as to the verse and cadence) was in a manner forgotten, and the same hymn was never heard twice. I know not what these *unpremeditated pieces* were in point of composition; but, were I persuaded of the unlawfulness of forms of prayer, and at the same time approved of the practice of singing in public worship, I would extremely covet the talent of extempore hymn-making, as one of the most necessary gifts a minister could possess, in order to maintain a consistency in his whole service.

I here close what I intended by way of introduction. In my subsequent letters, I purpose to acquaint you more directly with the reasons which determined my own choice, and which still satisfy me,

that in receiving *Episcopal ordination*, and exercising my ministry in the *established church*, I have not acted wrong. At present, I shall relieve your attention, by subscribing myself,

Your affectionate friend and brother,
John Newton

Letter 2

My dear friend and brother,

As such I address you as such, notwithstanding our different views of church-government, you have acknowledged me as your Christian brother. You have confirmed your love to me by many repeated proofs; and it is the desire of my heart, that nothing may take place on either side to weaken the exercise of that friendship, which, having the faith and hope of the Gospel for its basis, is calculated to exist and flourish in the heavenly world. With this thought upon my mind, it is impossible that I should write a single line with an intention of grieving or offending you; and I am persuaded the same consideration on your part will dispose you to a candid perusal of what I offer. I had rather be silent than plead, even for truth, in an *angry, contentious spirit*; for every year of my life strengthens my conviction of the importance of that divine aphorism, "*Man's anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.*" James 1:20

How far what I have suggested in favor of establishments and liturgies may appear conclusive to you, I know not. I depend much upon your sincerity; but I make allowances for the *unavoidable influence of education, friends, and habit*—both in you and in myself. We generally ascribe the dissent of those who differ from us, in part at least, to prejudices of this kind; but, as it is very natural to

think favorably of ourselves, we almost take it for granted that *we* have either escaped or outgrown every bias! Though some of the principles we maintain have been instilled into us from our childhood, and we have been confirmed in what we say is right, by the instruction, advice, and example of friends—exactly as others have been confirmed in what we call *wrong*. Yet we think that that possessiveness, which we see in them as the effect of *ignorant prejudice*, is in *us* a very different thing—a just attachment to truth, and the result of impartial examination and full conviction. For my own part, I dare not say that I am free from all bias and presuppositions; but I desire and endeavor to guard against their influence.

But, though I have ventured to defend the propriety of a *national established church*, and, upon that ground, the expediency of a liturgy, I need not tell you that I had no hand in forming either the one or the other. By the allotment of Divine Providence, I was born in a nation where these things had taken place long before I came into the world; therefore, when the Lord gave me a desire to preach his Gospel, and it became necessary to determine under what character I should exercise my ministry, the question before me was *not*— What form of church-government I might propose as the most Scriptural, if all parties among us were willing to refer themselves to my decision? But my inquiry was rather directed to this point, What would be my path of duty—living, as I did, in the Island of Great Britain, and in that part of it named England?

At first, indeed, I saw but little room for deliberation. For about six years after I was awakened to some concern for my soul, my situation in life had secluded me equally from *every* religious party. During this period, in which I walked alone, the Lord was pleased to show me the way to the throne of grace, and to lead me to study and

prize his holy Word. By his blessing, I made some advances in knowledge, though slowly, under such discouragements and disadvantages, as they, who, from the beginning of their inquiries, are favored with public ordinances and the help of Christian fellowship, can have no proper conception of. At length I became acquainted with some of his people, and had frequent opportunities of hearing the Gospel. My *first* connections of this sort were chiefly with *Dissenters*, and brought me, as it were, into a new world; for, until then, I had hardly an idea of the different names and modes by which professing Christians were distinguished and subdivided, nor of the animosity with which their various disputes were carried on! But, as I received benefit and pleasure from my fellowship with my new friends, it is no wonder that, while my heart was warm, and my experience and judgment unformed —that I should enter with readiness into all their views. Thus, together with the real advantages I obtained among them, I imbibed, at the same time, a *strong prejudice against the established church*, and hastily concluded, that, though I might occasionally communicate with it as a private person, it would be impossible to officiate in it as a minister, without violating my conscience. Accordingly, my first overtures were to the *Dissenters*; and, had not the providence of God remarkably interposed to prevent it, I would probably have been a brother with you in every sense.

But *my* designs were overruled. A variety of doors by which I sought entrance, (for I did not give up upon the first disappointment,) were successively shut against me. These repeated delays afforded me more time to think and judge for myself; and the more I considered the point, the more my *scruples against the Episcopal church* gave way. Reasons increased upon me, which not only satisfied me that I might conform without sin—but that the *preference* (as to my own concern) was plainly on that side. Accordingly, in the Lord's due

time, after several years waiting to know his will, I sought and obtained Episcopal ordination; and I seriously assure you, that, though I took this step with a firm persuasion that it was right, I did not, at that time, see so many reasons to justify my choice, nor perhaps any one reason in so strong a light, as I have since. Far from having regretted this interesting part of my conduct for a single hour, I have been more satisfied with it from year to year.

You will please, therefore, accept what I am about to offer, not merely as an account of the motives which influenced me twenty years ago—but rather as the considerations which, at this minute, call upon me to be heartily thankful to the Lord, for leading me by a way which I knew not, to labor in that part of his vineyard, which experience has proved to be most suitable for maintaining my personal peace and comfort, and (I truly believe likewise) for promoting my usefulness as a minister.

Some of our dissenting brethren, who, I hope, are willing to think as well of the awakened clergy in the Church of England, as they can, kindly allow us to be well-meaning people. They believe we desire to be useful, and think it not impossible but that, in some instances, we may be so; but they pity us, either for not having more light, or for not having courage to follow that light, which, they suppose, must force itself upon us—if we did not willfully shut it out. From what they hear of us, they are staggered. They are reluctant to deny that the Lord is with us at all; but then, if the Lord is with us indeed, why are we thus? It is almost unaccountable to them, upon this supposition, how we can remain where we are. They are expecting from day to day, that, if we are enlightened, as we profess, and are honest men, as they wish to find us, we shall surely come out from 'Babylon', renounce our slavery, and will-worship, and openly attach ourselves to the Dissenting Interest. Could we do this, and persuade

our people to follow us, they would, probably, no longer doubt whether the Lord had wrought by our ministry or not.

I could wish you not to think of *me* while you read the paragraph I am now beginning. You know many of our ministers, and you know that there are among them men of sound sense, solid judgment, and extensive Christian reading—men whom the Lord has been pleased to favor with an eminency in gifts and spiritual knowledge; in a word, able ministers of the New Testament. Men, who, though in the sight of the Lord they lie low in the dust, conscious of inherent defilement, and that their best services need forgiveness; yet, with regard to their fellow-creatures, can, in the integrity of their hearts, appeal to all around them, that their life is not befitting of the Gospel which they preach. Some of these men, at least, have carefully studied the subject-matter of debate between us and the Dissenters, have read the books, and considered the arguments which are supposed sufficient to convert and reform us; but, after all their endeavors to obtain information, though they agree with the evangelical Dissenters in their views of the Gospel, (which yet they received not from them—but from the holy Scripture,) they are still constrained to differ on the question of *church form and order*.

Now, why should this be imputed to their ignorance and blindness? Why should their not acceding to you—be imputed to selfish motives? There are with us men whose integrity and sincerity are, in every other respect, unimpeachable; and it is hard that, without sufficient evidence, they should be charged with blatant hypocrisy in a business which concerns the honor of their Savior, and the uprightness of their consciences in his sight. Besides, what can be the powerful motives for such hypocrisy? Do they, by remaining in the establishment, avoid the offence of the cross, and find a shelter from

that opprobrium and opposition which must be their lot if they had the fortitude to unite with the Dissenters?

Here, at least, however, we may be mistaken. I apprehend the Lord has assigned to us the post of honor; and that in the treatment we meet with from an unbelieving world, our lot rather resembles that of the Dissenters in the last century, than of the present. It is true, we are no more exposed to fines and imprisonment than you are; but, if it be an honor to suffer shame for his name's sake, I think we have the pre-eminence.

As to "money-matters", I could name several of our clergy who are not so plentifully provided for in the establishment—but that, if they were to leave us, and go over to your side, it is very probable the manner in which converts of such characters and abilities would be received among you, might considerably increase their income.

Nor can it upon better grounds be ascribed to obstinate prejudice and incurable bigotry, that your arguments do not prevail. For it is well known that many of our ministers show a cordial and liberal spirit to the Dissenters, receive them gladly into their houses, attend occasionally upon their preaching, recommend and encourage applications for the support of their ministers or places of worship, and are ready to concur with them in every plan for usefulness. And I believe this disposition would be more general, had not experience shown that the candor of some of your clergymen, in these respects, has been too often improperly requited by ungenerous attempts to prejudice and perplex our people, and to weaken our hands.

Yet one or other, or all these charges, must be insinuated against us, rather than *fallible* men will suppose themselves anything else than *infallible*, even in points of a secondary nature; and though others,

whom they have no reason to think inferior to themselves either in judgment or integrity, are compelled to differ from them.

Be assured, dear sir, that, in thus apologizing for my brethren, I write, not only without their desire—but without their knowledge. I think I have now finished all my preambles, and I proceed immediately to acquaint you with **my reasons for conforming to the established church of England, and continuing in it.**

My first and principal reason is, the regard I owe to the honor and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as head and lawgiver of his church. I do not mean that this consideration obliges me absolutely to prefer the form of the Church of England to any other form—but only that it will not permit me to join with those who make dissenting from it necessary in point of conscience.

I cannot suppose that any true Christian in our land of light and liberty, will hesitate a moment to acknowledge that Christ is the one infallible, authoritative Legislator and Governor of his church; that he is the Lord, and the only Lord of conscience; that nothing inconsistent with his revealed will should be practiced, nothing that he has enjoined be omitted, by those who profess allegiance to him.

But, however generally acknowledged these principles are, I believe the misconstruction and misapplication of them have contributed more to divide the people of God, and to alienate their affections from each other, than any other cause that can be assigned. It seems reasonable to expect that those whose hopes are built upon the same foundation, who are led by the same Spirit, who are opposed by the same enemies, and interested by the same promises—would look upon each other with mutual delight, would love as brethren, would bear each other's burdens—and so fulfill their Master's law, and copy his example. But, alas! a mistaken zeal for his honor fills them on all

sides, with animosity against their fellow disciples, splits them into a thousand parties, gives rise to fierce and endless contentions, and makes them so earnest for and against their respective distinctives, that the *love*, which is the discriminating characteristic of his religion, is scarcely to be found among them in such a degree of exercise, as to satisfy even candid observers whether they bear his mark or not.

The visible church of Christ comprises all who call themselves by his name, and who profess to receive his Gospel as a divine revelation. It is a *floor* on which the grain and the chaff are mingled, a *field* in which the wheat and the tares grow together, a *net* enclosing a multitude of fish both good and bad. But the visible church of Christ, taken in this large extent, is not the proper subject of his government, as He is the King of the saints alone. For his kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, which none can understand, and his rule a spiritual rule, which none can receive or obey—until born from above, and made new creatures by the power of the Holy Spirit. If these *regenerated* people, who, it is to be feared, are seldom the largest number in any denomination, are considered as detached from the visible church, the remainder is a merely differenced from the world, which lies in wickedness, in nothing but a *name*, and in the privilege of having the oracles of God committed to it. But *nominal professors*, though they have, or may have, in their hands the Scriptures, which are able to make sinners wise unto salvation, are no less distant and alienated from the life of God, (until he is pleased to reveal his power in their hearts,) than Mahommedans or Heathen! And, with respect to these, the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ is but little concerned with the different ways in which they may think proper to constitute themselves into national or particular churches, and please themselves with a lifeless form of worship, while their hearts are in a state of enmity to his grace!

Admitting that the plan of a Gospel-church was described with the same precision in the New Testament, as the institutions of the Levitical worship in the Old, and punctually complied with to the minutest circumstance; though the worshipers might applaud and admire their own exactness, and censure and despise all who differed a hair's breadth from them; yet, if they did not serve God in spirit and in truth, their boasted *church order* would avail them nothing. All that related to the worship of God under the law was confessedly of divine appointment; and the people in the time of the prophets, were not so much charged with *neglecting* the prescribed forms—as with *resting* in them! When this evil became general, and they thought to compensate for their lack of spirituality, by their feasts, fasts, and sacrifices, the Lord expresses himself as displeased with his own institutions! Isaiah 1:11-15; Isaiah 66:3-4; Jer. 7:8-14, Jer. 7:22-23. They could plead *his prescription* for their observances; but in vain they trusted to the temple, and said, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we!" when the Lord of the temple was departed from them. And certainly he will be no more pleased with a form without the heart now—than he was then!

I must, therefore, confine my inquiry to the church of Christ in a more limited and proper sense; as expressive of his mystical body, composed of all who by faith are united to him as their foundation and root, of all to whom he is the head of vital influence, who have fellowship with him in his death, and are partakers of the power of his resurrection. These are infallibly known only to himself. They are scattered far and wide, separated from each other by seas and mountains; they are a people of many nations and languages. But, wherever their lot is cast, they hear his voice, are under his gracious eye, and the life which they live in the flesh, is by faith in his name. They have not all equal degrees of light, or measures of grace, nor are they all favored with equal advantages for knowing or enjoying the

full extent of the liberty of the Gospel; but they are all *accepted in the Beloved*, and approved of God. They are all spiritual worshipers, joint partakers of grace, and will hereafter appear together at their Savior's right hand in glory.

At present they are in an imperfect state. Though they are new creations—they are not freed from the 'principle of indwelling sin'. Their knowledge is clouded by much remaining ignorance; and their zeal, though right in its aim, is often warped and misguided by the corrupt influence of SELF. For they still have many corruptions. They live in a world which furnishes frequent occasions of enticing them. And Satan, their subtle and powerful enemy, is always upon his watch to mislead and ensnare them!

Besides all this—they are born, educated, and effectually called, under a great variety of circumstances. Habits of life, local customs, early relationships of families and friends, and even bodily constitution, have more or less influence in forming their characters, and in giving a tincture and turn to their manner of thinking; so that, in matters of a secondary nature—their sentiments may, and often do—differ as much as the features of their faces! A uniformity of judgment among them on these secondary matters, is not to be expected, while the wisest are defective in knowledge, the holiest are defiled with sin, and while the weaknesses of human nature, which are common to them all—are so differently affected by a thousand impressions which arise from their various situations.

They might, however, maintain a unity of spirit, and live in the exercise of mutual love, were it not that almost every individual, unhappily conceives that they are bound in conscience, to prescribe their own line of conduct—as a standard to which all their brethren ought to conform! They are but few, who consider this "narrow

mind-set" to be as unnecessary, unreasonable, and impracticable, as it would be to insist, or expect, that every man's shoes should be exactly of one size!

Thus, though all agree in asserting the authority and right of the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church—yet the various ideas they frame of the rule or standard to which He requires them to conform, and their pertinacious attachment to their own conceptions of it—separate them almost as much from each other, as if they were not united to Him by a principle of living faith! Their little differences form them into so many separate churches; and the fury with which they defend their own ideas, and oppose all who cannot agree with them in every minute point, makes them forget that they are children in the same family, and servants of the same Master! And, while they vex and worry each other with disputations and censures—the world is bewildered by all this, and laughs at them all! The spirit of love is restrained, offences are multiplied, and Satan is gratified by beholding the extensive effects of his pernicious and long-practiced maxim, Divide and conquer!

I am far from supposing that all the various modes of church-government under which spiritual worshipers are cast, are equally agreeable to the *spirit and genius of the Gospel*, or equally suited to the purposes of edification. Perhaps there is no considerable body of people who profess themselves Christians, however erroneous in their plans of doctrine or worship, among whom the Savior has not some *hidden ones*, known to himself, though lost to human observation in the crowd of *pretenders* which surround them. The power of his grace can break through all disadvantages, and make a few individuals wiser than their teachers—by revealing his truth to their heart, sooner or later, so far as is necessary to salvation. But it must be owned that some communities which bear the name of

Christian, have departed so very far from the simplicity of the Gospel, that we may reason and conclude, that it is almost impossible for a converted person to continue a single day in such a church! But such reasoning cannot be maintained against plain facts.

Thus the *Church of Rome*, not merely by adopting an unmeaning burdensome train of ceremonies—but by her doctrines of papal infallibility, praying to saints and angels, purgatory, absolution, the mass, and other doctrines of the like stamp, has become so exceedingly adulterated, that possibly some people who may read this treatise, will form an unfavorable opinion of me, for declaring that I have not the least doubt but the Lord Jesus has had, from age to age, a succession of chosen and faithful witnesses within the pale of that corrupt church! Yet, I would hope, that they, who, having themselves tasted that the Lord is gracious, know the language of a heart under the influence of his Spirit, would, in defiance of *Protestant prejudices*, be of my mind, if they had opportunity of perusing the writings of some Papists. If such people as Fenelon, Pascal, Quesnel, and Nicole, (to mention no more,) were not true Christians, where shall we find any who deserve the name? In the writings of these great men, notwithstanding *incidental errors*, I meet with such strains of experimental godliness, such deep knowledge of the workings of the Spirit of God and of the heart of man, and such masterly explications of many important passages of Scripture, as might do honor to the most enlightened Protestant! And yet these men lived and died in the Popish church, and, to their last hours! And, though I have not equal means of information, I can as little doubt that the Lord has a people likewise in the Greek Church, which, as to its external frame, seems to be little less unscriptural than the Church of Rome itself!

However, I desire to be thankful that I am not a Papist! I am at least one step nearer to the true and acceptable worship of God. For I believe the most rigid of our dissenting brethren will allow, that the Church of England, if almost, yet is not altogether so depraved and corrupt in its constitution as the Church of Rome. I am now in my track, and shall trouble you with fewer digressions in the sequel. My next point will be to examine the different claims of Protestant churches to the honor they all assume—that their respective institutions are most conformable to the rules the apostles have laid down on the subject of church-government, and express the greatest regard to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the undoubted Head and Lawgiver of his church. And to avoid, as much as I can, encumbering what I write in an epistolary way to a friend, with the stiffness of argumentation, I shall content myself with giving you a simple account of what occurred to me upon this head, when I made the inquiry for my own direction. But it is time to conclude this letter, by assuring you, that I am your affectionate friend,
John Newton

Letter 3

My dear friend and brother,

If the *authority of men* truly respectable for learning, judgment, and grace were sufficient to determine the question: which of the various forms of church-government now current among Christians, is most agreeable to the letter and spirit of the New Testament, a modest inquirer, who wishes for the sanction of those whom he esteems wiser and better than himself, would, probably, without hesitation, join himself to that party to which he might be first led to apply for direction. For, whatever difference there may be in the merit of their

several claims for pre-eminence, the claim itself is made with an equal degree of confidence by them all. At a time when I was very sensible of my own incompetence to decide this point for myself, I received (as I hope) much benefit from the writings of Bishop Hall, Reynolds, Davenant, Mr. Hooker, and other divines of the Church of England. I perceived they were people of strong sense, extensive literature, sound in the faith; and, from such accounts of their lives as I could collect, I judged they had been zealous and diligent in their callings, and burning and shining lights in the world. I could not perceive that any of them were dissatisfied with the established church, in which they lived and died; and some of them I found were very strenuous in its defense, not only pleading that it was lawful to maintain communion with it—but offering many arguments to prove that it was even sinful to separate from it, and that it was the *only* resemblance of the primitive apostolical church.

I own to you, that I thought some of their assertions upon this head were too strong, and some of their arguments not fully conclusive. Yet I was a little staggered, and it gave me pain to be forced to differ, in any point, from men whom I believed to have been full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. However, some general idea I possessed of the liberty of the Gospel, a conviction that the Lord had a *people* and a *work* in other countries where the form of the Church of England could not take place, and the previous attachment I had to the Dissenters with whom, as I have said, I was first acquainted, prevented me from becoming what is called a *High Churchman*. But, as for these reasons, I could not give the Church of England an exclusive preference, or think myself authorized to brand those who dissented from it with the hard names of schismatics and fanatics; so, on the other hand, I could not go into the opposite extreme, or suppose that a church in which the Lord employed and owned such valuable men, and had a numerous spiritual people was no better

than a *Babylon*, from whence all who loved his name and salvation were in duty and conscience bound to withdraw.

Many books, likewise, came in my way, written by divines of the church of Scotland. In the writings of Durham, Fleming, Halyburton, and others, I found proofs that they were not inferior in light, holiness, and a sound spiritual judgment, to the most eminent luminaries of our own church. In what concerned the life and power of religion, I could perceive no considerable difference between them. *As they were all taught by the same Spirit—so they were all teachers of the same truths.* But in their sentiments upon church-government they differed very widely. Wherein they agreed, I could fully agree with them; wherein they differed, I was left in the uncertainty of a traveler, who, inquiring his way of two people, is told by one to turn to the right, and by the other, directly opposite, to the left!

My *Anglican* guides would persuade me that the form of the church from the apostles' days was Episcopal. But my Scotch guides were positive that our prelacy was, almost equally with the papacy, a branch and a mark of antichrist! If I compared the sufficiency of each to decide for me—I knew not which to prefer! On both sides were men of wisdom and grace, and who I believed would not willfully mislead me; on both sides they confessed themselves, in general, to be, like myself, fallible, and liable to mistake. Only in this one point, both sides appeared confident that they could not be mistaken; and yet their opinions were not only diverse—but contradictory!

The suspense in which I was held by these incompatible claimants, sent me more readily and attentively to renew my inquiries among my former friends of your denomination. By these I was instructed, that I need not trouble myself with weighing and comparing the

arguments which the English and Scotch churches had to offer in favor of their respective constitutions, for they were both equally destitute of any foundation in truth or Scripture: that I had only to read the New Testament for myself, and it must appear very plain, that the Lord Christ had not left a concern of this importance undetermined; but had directed his apostles to leave in their writings a pattern, according to which it was his pleasure all his churches in future ages should be formed: that the first churches were Congregational or Independent; and that every other plan was unscriptural, and a presumptuous deviation from the declared will of the Lord. As I had been a debtor to some of their writers likewise, and was personally acquainted with several of their ministers, their representations had so much weight with me, as to increase my confusion!

My difficulties grew upon me, when I found, by consulting different Independent writers, who had professedly treated this subject, that, though they were of one mind, in asserting that a plain and satisfactory pattern for this congregational order might be easily collected, and stated from a perusal of the New Testament; yet, when they came to delineate and describe it according to their own idea, they were far from being agreed among themselves, as to the nature and number of the officers, powers, and acts, which are requisite to the constitution and administration of a regularly organized gospel church. I formerly employed much time and attention in this disquisition; but, not having for many years past reviewed a controversy which I think rather dry and uninteresting, I cannot, from memory, enter into a detail of particulars; nor is it needful.

Of the fact, I think I may be confident—that there is *not* such an *agreement* among them as might be expected, if the plan from which they all profess to copy was clearly and expressly revealed in the New

Testament, as obligatory upon all Christians. Here I was at a loss again; for, if I could have admitted their principle, that every circumstance of worship and government in a church ought to have the warrant of a precept or a precedent from the Scripture; still I needed help to digest and put together the several regulations which were dispersed in so many different parts of the Gospels and Epistles; for I found myself unable to frame the detached materials into one orderly structure by my own skill. But, when they, who professed to have the light which I wanted, were themselves divided upon the point, I was precluded from the hope of any certain assistance; for, as to *probabilities* and *conjectures*, I might as well depend upon my own, as upon those of another.

Nor was this the whole of my difficulty. I was honestly advised to read and examine for myself. I did so; and it appeared to me, by comparing what I read with what I saw, that the Independents could not, at least did not, keep closely to their own principles. I thought I met with usages in the churches planted by the apostles, which were not practiced in any of the congregational churches I was acquainted with. And, on the other hand, I noticed some practices among them—of which I could find no traces in the inspired account we have of the primitive churches! Permit me, by way of specimen, to mention one instance in each kind. If it was necessary, I could mention several; but I wish not to be tedious.

The apostle Paul addresses the Corinthians as a church of Christ; and we have from him a larger and more particular account of the practices of their church than of any other. After censuring and correcting some improprieties which had been practiced in their public assemblies, he give them this direction: "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the

first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged." 1 Corinthians 14:29-31. The general practice of congregational churches in our time seems not at all to comply with this apostolic injunction. I think, my friend, in your assemblies, especially in your solemn stated worship on the Lord's day, there is seldom more than one speaker. The same minister who preaches, usually begins and ends the service. Should it be pleaded that the apostle speaks of prophesying, and evidently supposes that the church of Corinth was favored with extraordinary gifts and revelations which are now ceased, and that therefore the rule cannot, in that respect, extend to us; I have two answers to make:

In the first place, though we do not expect extraordinary revelations, we have encouragement to hope for the presence of our Savior, and the gracious influences of his Spirit, when we meet in his name, sufficient to enable us to speak to his praise, and to the edification and comfort of our brethren. And it is probable that you have more than once been a hearer in a public assembly, when your heart has been so warmed and impressed with the truths of the gospel, that you would have been willing to have ascended the pulpit yourself, either to confirm or correct what you have been hearing, or to indulge the liberty you found in your mind upon some other important subject. Perhaps something was then revealed to you, which might have been very suitable to the occasion, and to the state of the congregation. Why did you not then declare it? Why did you neglect to stir up the gift of God that was in you? Would it have been contrary to the custom of your churches? But would you not, upon your principles, have been justified by the custom of a New Testament church, and the injunction of an apostle?

But, secondly, and chiefly, I answer, if it is admitted that, because the primitive churches had extraordinary gifts, there are some things in their practice which are not proper for our imitation, who have not the same gifts: then I quite give up the hope of being able to determine the exact and invariable form of a church, by such lights as the Acts of the Apostles and their Epistles afford me; unless some man, or set of men, are qualified and commissioned to *draw the line* for me, and to show me distinctly how far, and in what instances—the state of the first Christians is limited from being a pattern to us, by the extraordinary dispensations of that age; and how far, and in what cases, their pattern is binding upon us still, notwithstanding those dispensations have long since ceased.

To be directed to study these churches as a model and pattern—and to be told, at the same time, that only *some* parts of their practice were not designed for the imitation of future ages, without distinctly specifying which were, and which were not—is rather the way to *perplex* and *bewilder* an inquirer, than to help him to comprehend the issue! Upon this ground, though I might refuse to trust the assumed infallibility of the Pope, I must feel the need of an *infallible visible guide* to reside somewhere in the church; for without such assistance I could not take a single step with certainty—but must be liable to stumble at the very threshold of my inquiry.

I think it is the usual practice, in your churches, to require from all people who wish to be admitted into your communion, an account, either verbal or written, of what is called *their experience*; in which, not only a declaration of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and their purpose, by grace, to devote themselves to him, is expected—but likewise a recital of the steps by which they were led to a knowledge and profession of the gospel. I select this as one instance in which, I

conceive, you have neither *precept* nor *precedent* in the Scripture for your warrant!

A profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of acceptance of him, and submission to him in his offices and characters, supported by the evidence of a gospel life-style should, I apprehend, be deemed sufficient to entitle a person to church-membership; and especially by those who so loudly insist upon the *evil of superadding any regulations* to those which are already provided by our Lord and his apostles. The authority which makes it a pre-requisite for admission, that a person shall relate how and when he was awakened, what exercises of mind he has passed through, and other particulars of a like nature, appears to me to be as merely *human*—as the authority which prescribes the canons of an established church! If the practice is defensible, it must be on the plea of *expediency*.

It is not my present business, to inquire how far it may be expedient for young converts, for young people, especially for young women, to be compelled to *speak* before a public assembly; or, if that is dispensed with, for the sake of other interfering expediencies, how far it is expedient to trust to a *written* experience; otherwise I could say a good deal upon this head.

But it is sufficient for my purpose, that no hint of this practice can be found in the New Testament. On the contrary, I read, that, when Saul, after he escaped from Damascus, attempted to join himself to the disciples, it was *Barnabas*, and not Saul himself, who informed them both of his conversion, and of the extraordinary manner in which it was effected, giving a testimony of his conduct from the time he had professed a change. But, if *expediency* may warrant a *measure or standard* in your churches not expressly commanded in

Scripture, why not, likewise, in ours? Be it either right or wrong in one case—it must be so in both!

I am afraid I shall weary you, by only giving a brief account of the long and intricate road which I traveled, to discover, if I could, *the best constituted church*. But I must entreat your patience a little longer, until I bring you to the end of my journey.

It may be necessary to inform some of my readers, though not you, that a considerable part of the *independent congregational* churches differ from the rest, with respect to the mode and subjects of *baptism*. At the time when my thoughts were most engaged about church-order, I lived in intimate habits of friendship with several *Baptists*, who were very willing to assist me in settling my judgment. These, though they would have been pleased to see me yield to the arguments of their *Paedobaptist* congregational churches, would not be satisfied that I should stop were they stopped. They urged Scripture precepts and precedents to lead me farther; and said, that none of the congregational churches—but their own, were agreeable to the mind of Christ. They told me, that, though I should acknowledge and embrace the congregational order, which, undoubtedly, was the only one countenanced by Scripture, still I could not be right until I had renounced what I called the *baptism* I had received in my *infancy*, and submitted (as they termed it) to *baptism by immersion*, to which I was bound, not only by the practice of the primitive church—but by the example of our Lord himself, who, when he was baptized, said, for our instruction, "Thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness."

I own, sir, that, if I had seen it my duty to accede to the church-order of the Independents, I know not but their principles would have led me away from them—to join with the Baptists. How they, who,

maintaining infant baptism, press Scripture precedent so strongly upon me, answer the Baptists, who in this point press it as strongly upon themselves, is not my concern. I did not stand upon the same ground, and therefore the arguments of the Baptists did not much affect me. I thought the example of our Lord pleaded as much for *circumcision* as for *baptism*. I questioned whether I, a poor sinner, had any call to imitate him in those things which it befit him, as our Surety, to perform, in order "to fulfill all righteousness." It appeared to me, that *John's* baptism and the *Christian* baptism were different; and, though the Baptists assured me that they were the same, I was not convinced. I thought they were plainly distinguished in Acts 19:2-5; and I was grieved by the attempts of some wise and good men to wrest a sense from that passage, so contrary to its plain and obvious meaning, *merely to support a favorite scheme*. And, as the *form of Christian baptism* is laid down in express words, Mat. 28:19, I must continue to think it different from the baptism of John, until I can have sufficient proof that John baptized our Savior in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I found, likewise, that the Baptists, though unanimous against us, and even against those who in every point but one agree with them, were divided among themselves. Some of them, while they practice what they think a duty, do not so peremptorily prescribe it to others, as to make it an indispensable term of communion; but they will receive a person as a church-member whom they judge to be sound in the faith, and of a holy life, though they consider him, in strictness of speech, as unbaptized. But others are much offended by this concession, and bear testimony against it as unscriptural and wrong. Their views are so strict, that if they certainly knew that a person who wished to communicate with them was the most eminent Christian in the land, unless he was likewise baptized in their manner, they could not, they dared not, admit him to the Lord's

table, to eat of that bread, and to drink of that cup, which is, by his command and appointment, the privilege and portion of all believers. This difference of judgment between them has been thought so important, that the reasons for and against, and their mutual censures of each other, have been laid before the public, by good men on each side of the question.

Now, my dear friend, this state of the case, what could I do? I had reviewed and compared the sentiments of a number of respectable writers and ministers of different names. In *essentials*, I agreed with them all; and, in *secondary matters*, I differed no more from any of them, than they differed among themselves! They all confessed they were *fallible*, yet they all decided with an air of *infallibility*; for they all, in their turns, expected me to unite with them, if I had any regard to the authority and honor of the Lord Jesus as head and lawgiver of the church! But the very consideration they proposed, restrained me from uniting with any of them. For I cannot think that I would honor the headship and kingly office of Christ, by acknowledging him as the head of a *certain denomination* and subdivision of his people, to the exclusion of the rest. Every party uses fair-sounding words of *liberty*; but, when an explanation is made, it amounts to little more than this—that *they will give me liberty to think only as they think, and to act only as they act*; which, to me, who claims the same right of thinking for myself, and of acting according to the dictates of my own conscience, is no liberty at all.

I therefore came to such conclusions as these—that I would love them all—that I would hold a friendly fellowship with them all, so far as they should providentially come in my way; but that I would stand fast in the liberty with which Christ had made me free, and call none of them 'master'! In fine, that if others sought to honor him, by laying a great stress on *matters of doubtful disputation*; that it would be my

way of honoring him, by endeavoring to show that his kingdom is not of this world, nor consists in foods and drinks, in pleading for forms and parties—but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit; and that neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision—but a new creature, and the faith which works by love.

There was a time when I could have joined with the Dissenters, if the providence of God had opened my way to them; but farther experience and observation have so far altered my judgment, that, had I my choice to make again, it seems to me, that I could no more officiate as a minister among any people who insist upon *other* terms of communion than those which our Lord has appointed, *faith* and *holiness*—than I could subscribe to the dogmas of the *Council of Trent!* My regard to his honor will not allow me to exclude *any* whom I believe he has been pleased to receive.

Thus much for the first reason of my joining to the Church of England. Yet, in justice to the non-conformists, I must add, that, if I wished to avail myself of the sanction of great names, I could mention some among them, who, if they were now living, I am persuaded, would not blame me for my choice, though they could not, in conscience, do it themselves. Particularly I judge this (from many of his writings) of the truly great Mr. Howe, whose praise is in all the churches.

I am sincerely yours,
John Newton

Letter 4

My dear friend and brother,

I have given you the chief reason why I am not a Dissenter; and it appears to me a sufficient one, though I could assign no other. I have, however, two or three more to offer you; but I hope to comprise them all within the compass of this letter; for, indeed, I begin to be weary of a subject which is not quite suitable to my taste and inclination. But it seems not unseasonable, and, I hope, may not be unuseful, to show you that the preference I have given to the Church of England is not the effect either of *ignorance* or *prejudice*.

My second reason for not being a Dissenter, is, BECAUSE I HIGHLY VALUE THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT, AND MY LIBERTY AS A MAN AND AS A CHRISTIAN. Here again I think we are agreed in *principle*. You rejoice in the name of a *Protestant Dissenter*, as setting you free from the shackles and impositions of *men*; and, probably, think of me and my brethren in the *Establishment*, with a degree of *friendly pity*; taking it for granted that the engagements we are under, hold us in a painful state of subjection and bondage, from which you charitably wish to see us released. We are obliged to people of your candid disposition, for your sympathy and good wishes; and we repay you in kind. As we cannot think exactly alike—this seems the best method we can take. *Harsh censures* and *angry disputations* would be *unfitting* our profession, and *hurtful* to our spirits; but it can do us no harm to *pity* and *pray* for each other.

Perhaps you are ready to say, "You would surely pity me if you knew all my inward and outward trials; but you need not pity me for being a Dissenter, because I account it my great privilege." I may say the same, with the alteration of one word. If you knew the *evils* which I feel within, and the *snares* and *difficulties* which beset me from without, you would pity me indeed! But that I exercise my ministry in the Church of England, appears to me, as things stand, to be

rather a subject of *congratulation* than *compassion*. I cannot become a Dissenter, until I am weary of my *liberty*. If you please, we will compare notes upon this head.

Let me first speak of the **restraints** we are under. I am bound, by my subscription, to the forms and rubric of the Common Prayer Book; but I approve the service, and therefore it is no burden to me to use it. I do not consider it as faultless, nor can I subscribe to any *book of human composition* in the same absolute manner as I would to the Bible. But, by assenting to our church ritual, I give up less of my own private judgment, for the sake of peace, than I should by espousing the rules and practices of any dissenting churches which I am acquainted with.

Again, having accepted a designation to the cure of souls, my public ministry is thereby confined to parish churches; and I cannot, consistently with what I conceive to be the import of my voluntary engagements, preach at random, and in all places, without reserve. But this is no restraint upon my conscience. While I have the examples of our Lord and his apostles in my view, I cannot doubt the lawfulness of preaching on mountains or plains, in market-places, or on the seashore. But things in themselves *lawful*, are not always, or to all people, *expedient*. I approve of *parochial order*. I do not interfere with the conduct of others; but believe it is, upon the whole, best for me to confine myself to the duties of my own parish, and to such opportunities of preaching in parochial pulpits as may occasionally offer. Between the one and the other, I have sufficient employment.

And, though the bishop who ordained me, laid me under no restrictions, I would not have applied to him for ordination, if I had not been previously determined to submit to his authority, and to the

rules of the church. I thought, and still think, it my duty to preserve a consistency of character; for I was not ordained to be an apostle or evangelist, to spread the gospel throughout a kingdom—but to take care of the particular flock committed to my charge. But I need not enlarge upon this point, as I think the Dissenters do not in general, by their practice, countenance what we call irregularity—but are almost as seldom seen preaching in the fields or by the way-sides as the most regular of our clergy; though they cannot plead our reasons for not doing it, and are certainly not restrained either by the precepts or precedents of the New Testament.

Nor am I under any disagreeable constraint from my superiors in the church. The archdeacon in his district, and the bishop in his diocese, hold their respective visitations; the former annually, the latter once in three years. At these visitations, the clergy (especially in the country) are expected to attend. On these occasions, we hear a sermon, or a charge, and usually dine together. There is nothing painful to me in paying these *tokens of respect* to my acknowledged superiors, and receiving marks of civility from them. At all other times, while we keep within the limits which I have already told you I subscribed and consented to—we scarcely know, at least we do not feel, that we have any superiors.

So far as I am concerned, I have reason to acknowledge that the administration of our church-government is gentle and liberal. I have from the first, preached my sentiments with the greatest freedom. I always acted in the parishes which I have served according to my own judgment; and I have done some things which have not the sanction of *general custom*; but I never met with the smallest check, interference, or mark of displeasure from any of my superiors in the church, to this hour. Such are my restraints, and such is my liberty. I am bound by no regulations but, what I myself

approve; and within these boundaries I do as I please—no man forbidding or controlling me.

Indeed I have often thought that I have as good a right to the name of *Independent* as yourself. Neither you nor I would assume it to the prejudice of our dependence upon our Lord and Savior; and, with *respect to the influence of men*, perhaps, we have the advantage of you. I think we are more independent of our other *ministers* and *churches*.

Though, according to your plan, every particular church is called Independent, as possessing and exercising every kind of church power within itself, and not subject to the control of any other Christian society; yet, considering you as a *body*, or (according to the modern phrase) an interest, there is a kind of *union* and *association* among your ministers, which has a greater effect than some people are aware of, and which, I apprehend, may in some instances be rather unfriendly to the liberty which you so highly prize. Some of your ministers, from their situation or connection, have more influence than others. They have opportunities of assisting poorer ministers; and are, I suppose, in many cases, the judges whether they shall be assisted or not, and how far. They who best know human nature, are best qualified to judge how far the professed independence of your churches may be abated by this influence of connection; and whether the weight of your *board of ministers* may not be occasionally felt by those who pity us for being subordinate to our *bench of bishops*.

I have, upon some occasions, been led to compare your ministers to a company of soldiers in their exercise; where every one must move in a prescribed line, keep the same pace, and make the like motions, with the rest—on pain of being treated as refractory! Ministers in the

establishment know nothing of these restraints. We are connected in *love*—but not upon *system*. We profess the same leading principles and aims—but each one acts singly and individually for himself.

I think we are likewise more independent of our **people**. The constitution of your churches, which you suppose the only one agreeable to the Scripture, appears to me faulty, in giving a *greater power to the people* than the Scripture authorizes. There is, doubtless, a sense in which ministers are not only the servants of the Lord—but, for his sake, the servants of the churches; but it is a *service* which implies *rule*, and is entitled to respect. Thus the apostle says, "Obey those who have the rule over you." Their office is that of a steward, who is neither to lord it over the household, nor to be entirely under subjection to it—but to *superintend, direct* and *provide* for the family.

Scriptural regulations are wisely and graciously adapted to our state of infirmity; but I think the power which the people with you claim, and attempt to exercise, is not so. Many of them, though truly gracious people, may, notwithstanding, from their situation in life, their lack of education, and the narrowness of their views, be very incapable of government; yet, when a number of such are associated according to your plan, under the honorable title of a *church of Christ*, they acquire a great importance. Almost every individual conceives himself as *qualified to judge and to guide the minister*; to sift and scrutinize his expressions, and to tell him how and what he ought to preach. But the poorer part of your flocks are not always the most troublesome.

The *rich* can contribute most to the minister's support, who is often entirely dependent upon his people for a maintenance; their riches likewise give them some *additional weight* and *influence* in the

church; and the officers, whom you call the deacons, are usually chosen from among the more wealthy. But it is not always found that the most *wealthy* church members are the most eminent either for *grace* or *wisdom*. We may be rather sure, that riches, if the possessors are not proportionately humble and spiritual, have a direct tendency to nourish the worms of self-conceit and self-will. Such people expect to be *consulted*, and that *their judgment* shall be followed. The preaching must be suited to their taste and sentiment; and, if anything is either enforced or censured which bears hard upon their conduct, they think themselves ill-treated!

Although a faithful minister, in his better hours, disdains the thought of complying with the *caprice of his hearers*, or overlooking their faults; yet human nature is weak, and it must be allowed, that, in such circumstances, he stands in a state of temptation. And if he has grace to maintain his *integrity*; yet it is painful and difficult to be obliged frequently to displease those on whom we depend, and who, in some other respects, may be our best friends and benefactors!

I can truly say, that my heart has been grieved for the opposition, neglect, and unkindness, which some valuable men among you have, to my knowledge, met with, from those who *ought* to have esteemed them very highly for their work's sake. The effects of this *supreme power lodged in the people*, and of the unsanctified spirit in which it has been exercised, have been often visible in the *divisions* and *subdivisions* which have crumbled large churches into separate handfuls, if I may so speak. And to this, I am afraid, rather than to the spread of a work of grace, may be ascribed, in many instances, the great increase of the number of your churches of late years.

Now, in the *Established Church*, we know but little of these difficulties; we are not so much at the *mercy of our hearers for our*

subsistence; and, though we probably preach to some who are wiser and better, as well as richer, than ourselves—we have no hearers who assume a right to direct us, or whom we should stand in fear of if they did. For my own part, I wish to have a spirit willing to profit, by a hint even from a child, and to pay attention to the advice of any person who speaks to me in love, and in a right temper. But humble, loving Christians are more disposed to find fault with themselves—than with their minister; and to *receive* instruction than to *offer* it. But should a *worldly professor*, or a *zealot* for a party, expect me to accommodate my preaching to *his practice*, or to preach *his Shibboleth*, I could give him an answer—without being afraid of any consequences!

I may add, that I apprehend we have more liberty with respect to our **pulpits**. At least I remember to have heard sermons from some of your pulpits, the strain of which has been so very different from the professed sentiments of the proper pastor of the church, that I have thought to myself, "How did this person come preach in this church?" Upon inquiry I found, at one time, that the man was asked to preach at the request of a principal person in the church or congregation, who it seems approved him—though, I was persuaded, the pastor did not!

I esteem it likewise a branch of my *Christian liberty*, that I can *hear* whom I please, and have the *friends* whom I please, among the various denominations of Christians, without being called to account for it. I hope the Dissenters are likewise growing more into this liberty. However, as I know some among your people who would willingly hear me preach occasionally, were they not *afraid* of their ministers; so I know some of your ministers who would be willing to hear me preach—but do not, because they are afraid of their people!

Thus much (though more might be said) by way of comparing our advantages in point of liberty.

I am well pleased with my lot and liberty. If you are equally pleased with yours—I am glad for it. I write only on the defensive; I neither expect nor wish to alter your views. Enjoy your liberty; only allow me to enjoy and be thankful for mine!

I have now acquainted you with my two principal reasons for not being a Dissenter. The first concerned my **conscience**. For, though my regard to the authority of the great Lord and Lawgiver of the church, did not directly oblige me to unite with the establishment, it discouraged me from uniting with any of the parties who *pretended an exclusive right* from Him to enforce their own particular church forms.

As my conscience did not interfere, my second reason, though rather of a prudential kind, was of considerable weight with me. I loved **liberty**, and therefore gave a preference to the Church of England, believing I might in that situation exercise my ministry with the most freedom. I have made the experiment, and have no reason to repent of it.

These points being cleared, my way was open to attend to another consideration, which had a farther influence in determining my mind. This I am about to offer to you as a third reason for my being where I am—the **probability of greater usefulness**. This probability, as to myself and to others who can conform with a good conscience, seemed to lie on the side of the established church, upon several accounts.

1. Great multitudes in this 'so called' Christian nation, are grossly ignorant of the first principles of religion, inattentive to the worth

and welfare of their souls, and lamentably destitute of the proper means of instruction. I hoped for opportunities in the established church, of preaching to many who could not hear the Dissenters. The children of God, known to himself, are scattered abroad far and wide; and, as faith more usually comes by hearing, I admire his condescension and goodness in permitting his ministers to think differently on some external points, that they may, with an upright heart, serve him in the *different fields of his vineyard*.

They who are Dissenters upon *principle*, would act against their judgments and consciences, were they to join the Church of England for the sake of usefulness. I am well content that they should remain as they are; but it has been proved a mercy to thousands, that all who are called and qualified to preach the Gospel, are not like-minded in this respect.

2. The spirit of *bigotry* and *prejudice* is too prevalent on all sides. As there are Dissenters who would think it sinful to be seen within the walls of an Anglican church; so there are other people who place a principal part of their religion in an *ignorant attachment to our forms*, and could not easily be prevailed upon to enter within the doors of an *independent meeting-house*. But their prepossession in favor of our Anglican churches gives the minister who can conscientiously meet them there, a great advantage, humanly speaking, by confirming the truths of the Gospel, (which, when first declared, are generally disliked and opposed,) from the tenor of our Liturgy and Articles, to which they profess some regard.

A large part of our auditories, especially in places where the Gospel is considered as a novelty, consists of people of this description. But the Lord has been pleased, in very many instances, to honor our service among them with his blessing. By the power of his Spirit, the truth is

made manifest to their hearts; they are turned from *darkness* to light, and from the *bondage of sin* to serve the living God. Then their former prejudices subside; insomuch that many, who once despised and hated the Dissenters, have been afterwards persuaded to join with them. The Dissenting Interest would probably have been much weaker than it is at present, if it had not been strengthened by the accession of many Anglican church members; and many of your teachers and pastors, who had no inclination at first to hear *your* ministers, until they were first awakened under ours. The words of our Lord may in this sense be applied to many of your churches, "Other men labored—and you have entered into the fruits of their labors."

The aim of my ministry, I trust, is not to promote the interests of a certain sect or denomination, but to win souls for Christ. We have, however, the comfort to find, that a number are not only called—but edified and established, by the blessing of God on our preaching; and that many of the most judicious and spiritual of our people are armor against the insinuations which prevail on some to forsake the Church of England, in hopes of enjoying a *purser* and more acceptable worship among the Dissenters. As to those who do actually leave us, if they are truly benefited, if they really grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord, in humility, meekness, benevolence, and deadness to the world—more among you than they would have done among us—I can *sincerely* rejoice! But I think your brethren have no just reason to be either displeased, or sorry, that God has raised up ministers to preach to thousands—to whom they would never have had access.

3. I saw, likewise, that the Lord had been pleased, of late years, to return, by the power of his Spirit, to the Church of England; which, I believe, many Dissenters thought he had so utterly forsaken, that he

would return no more. This leads me to a tender point; and I wish to touch upon it with great tenderness. None of us have anything to *boast* of. Our warmest *exertions* in the service of such a Master are far too cold; and our greatest success falls very short of what we ought to pray for. We preach no other gospel than you do; we love and respect many of your ministers for their knowledge, piety, and exemplary holy lives. But I believe that you will allow that the general state of your churches at present, is not so spiritually lively and flourishing as it was in the days of the old non-conformists. I believe the best of your people were long ago sensible of a decline; that they sincerely lamented it, and earnestly prayed for a revival. Their prayers were at length answered—but not in the way they expected.

A great and spreading revival of religion took place—but the instruments were not Dissenters. At the time when I was ordained, there was a considerable number of regular *parochial ministers* who preached the doctrines of the Reformation. The number has been greatly increased since, and is still increasing. I could not but judge, that the Lord's presence with his Word in awakening sinners, and in applying it with power to the heart—was more evident and striking on our side—than on yours. Not because we are better than you; but because the work with us is rather new, whereas, among you, it is of an older date.

The history of the church of God and of human nature, in past ages, teaches us to expect that *revivals of true religion* will seldom stand long in their primitive height—but will gradually subside and degenerate, until things return, in a course of time, nearly to their former state; though a *name*, perhaps first imposed as a stigma by the world, and a *form*, which owed all its value to the Spirit that once enlivened it, may still remain. I wish I could affirm, that none, who were otherwise competent judges of a revival, have been prevented

by their prejudices, from rejoicing in what God has wrought among us. But I fear it has been otherwise, and that a spirit of *prejudice* and *party-spirit* revealed itself upon the occasion, which proved hurtful to some good men.

When I think of the abilities and characters of some dissenting ministers, I cannot but ascribe the *little visible success* they meet with, in some measure, to their unwillingness to acknowledge a *work of God* in which they themselves were not employed. Their reasons were not wholly groundless. A lively zeal for the glory of God, and the good of souls, in people whose judgments were not fully ripened by observation and experience, did not secure them from incidental mistakes and blemishes. These were easily seen, and eagerly noticed. A desire of being free from the least suspicion of giving countenance to the unguarded, though well-meant, sallies of active spirits, seems to have led some of your ministers into a contrary extreme; and their public discourses, though solid and judicious compositions, lost that animation in delivery, which is, in some degree, necessary to engage attention, and to keep up an auditory. Thus, while preachers, much inferior to them for learning and general knowledge in divinity, have had crowded assemblies, the pleasure with which I have heard some of your most eminent ministers, has been often abated by observing that the number of hearers has been much smaller than the number of pews in the place!

I must therefore confess, that one consideration which deterred me from joining the Dissenters, was, a fear lest the love of peace, and a temper rather compliant, might insensibly betray me into an over-cautious spirit, dampen my zeal, or divert it into a wrong channel, and thereby prevent the success at which I aimed. I rather chose to unite with those people whom I thought the most likely to maintain and encourage what little fervor I possessed; and where I saw the

most evident tokens of a power from on high accompanying the public ministrations. And, as I had my reasons likewise for not being an itinerant minister—a regular and stated charge in the *established church* engaged my preference.

My fourth reason, (the last I think it *necessary* to mention,) being rather a point of experience, must depend chiefly upon my own testimony, and therefore I need not enlarge much upon it. Superadded, however, to those which I have already stated, it greatly contributed to give full satisfaction to my mind: I mean, the proofs I had that the Lord—**by the openings and leadings of his providence**, pointed out to me the situation in which I was to serve him.

The first explicit notice I gave of my desire to enter the ministry, was to an intimate friend in *your* denomination, nearly six years before I was ordained. In the course of this interval, I made, and I received, a variety of applications and proposals; but everything failed, and every door by which I sought admission remained shut against me. I have already observed that this state of suspense gave me time to examine the subject of *church-government* more closely, and that the result of my studies was the gradual, and, at length, the complete removal of the difficulties and exceptions I had at first hastily imbibed against the established church.

At length, the Lord's time came—then obstacles, apparently insurmountable, suddenly and unexpectedly disappeared! Then I learned the reason of former disappointments. My way had been *mercifully hedged lip with thorns*—to prevent me taking a wrong course, and to keep me waiting until the place and service of his own appointment were prepared and ready for me. The coincidence of many circumstances, which I cannot explain to another, gave me a

very comfortable sense of the Lord's guidance. I received ordination in the Church of England with with wind and tide (if I may so speak) in my favor, with the most pleasing disposition of outward events, and the most assured persuasion, in my own mind, that I was following the call of God, and doing the will of God; of which I had at that time, little more doubt than if an angel had been sent from heaven to tell me so! Nor have I hesitated upon the point a single hour, from that day to this!

I think you will not be sorry to find I am drawing towards a close. Indeed, I would be ashamed to have written so much merely on my own account. I began this correspondence with you about seven years ago. More than one half of it was then written in a few weeks; but I felt a reluctance to proceed, because it seemed to be so much my own affair. But I have frequently thought since, that something upon the subject, written in a moderate and friendly spirit, (which it has been my prayer and endeavor to preserve,) might, by the Lord's blessing, be a means of promoting candor and benevolence among those who, in whatever else they differ in, have one Lord, one faith, one hope.

A desire of being instrumental in so good a work, has at length prevailed on me to revise what I had begun, to add what I thought farther necessary for completing my design, and to send it abroad. I cannot give you particular reasons why I have not done it sooner, or why I do it now. Our times, plans, and purposes, are under God's superior guidance and direction, which it is our duty and our privilege always to acknowledge, though we cannot always distinctly discern it. I shall be happy, if the outcome shall prove that I have been led to choose the *fittest time*, and to offer a *word in season*.

Those who love and preach the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, whatever name they bear among men, and whatever body of people they are united to—are engaged in one *common cause*. They are opposed by the same *enemies*. Their severest *conflicts* and their sweetest *comforts* are derived from the same sources. And they will, before long, meet in the same kingdom of glory, and join in the same songs of eternal praise—to Him who sits upon the throne, and to Him who redeemed us to God by his blood. How desirable then is it, that, while we live here—we should be at *peace* among ourselves, and live in the spirit of that *love*, (the only infallible mark of our being truly the servants of Christ,) which seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil—but bears, hopes, and believes all things!

As what I write to you is to appear in print, I think it proper to add, for my own sake, that my whole intention will be fulfilled by its publication. I do not mean to enter into *controversy*; and, therefore, if these letters, contrary to my wish, should raise an opponent, and give occasion to an answer, I shall not think myself bound to reply—unless I could be convicted of such willful misrepresentation on my part—as would render it my duty to ask pardon of God, and of the public.

I commend you and yours to the blessing of our Lord, and remain,
your affectionate friend,
John Newton

On Eating and Drinking

April 11, 1795

"Whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do—you must do all for the glory of God!" 1 Corinthians 10:31

"There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, **feasting lavishly every day.**" Luke 16:19

A sinner, considered as such, is not only destitute and incapable of spiritual blessings—but has forfeited all right to the comforts, and even the necessities, of the present life. It is of mere mercy that he is permitted to breathe the air, or walk upon the ground. But Jesus the Savior has not only brought life and immortality to light, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe in his name—but he has removed the curse which sin had entailed upon the lower creation. And now, to them, every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if received with thankfulness and moderation; for all is sanctified to their use by the Word of God and prayer. But these, which, in distinction from the communications of his grace, we call *common mercies*, are equally derived from his bounty, and the effects of his mediation.

We are therefore bound by gratitude, as well in the ordinary actions of life, as in those of the most importance, whether we eat or drink—to do all with a regard to his love, and with a view to his glory.

It is to be feared, that this apostolic rule is too much disregarded by many professors of the gospel. However they may seem to differ from the world, by a stated and orderly attendance upon the ordinances, they are not easily distinguished upon many other occasions; particularly at their meals. The people of the world can scarcely exceed them in the cost, care, profusion, and variety with which their tables are covered. I am willing to allow some regard to a person's situation in life; but perhaps the excess is more frequently observable

among people in trade, or, as we say, *in the middle classes*, than at the tables of the opulent.

A friend of mine, since deceased, told me, that, when he was a young man, he once dined with the late Dr. Butler, at that time Bishop of Durham; and, though the guest was a man of fortune, and the interview by appointment, the provision was no more than a simple meal. The Bishop apologized for his *plain fare*, by saying, "That it was his way of living; that he had been long disgusted with the fashionable expense of time and money in entertainments, and was determined that it should receive no countenance from his example." The economy of this truly venerable prelate was not the effect of stinginess; for I have been assured, that, though he was some time possessed of the princely revenue of Durham, he might be said to die poor, leaving little more money than was necessary to discharge his debts, and pay for his funeral. But we may accommodate to him, what the apostles said of themselves on another occasion, "He did not think it fit to leave the Word of God, and to serve tables."

And at the tables of some gentlemen of very respectable characters and affluent fortunes, who do me the honor to notice me, I have often seen little more than I would have thought it right to have had at my own, if they had favored me with their company. It is at least certain, that the *waste* and *parade* of which I complain, are by no means confined to those, who, according to the common phrase, *can best afford it*.

When ministers of the gospel are invited, they may sometimes have reason to suppose, that some part of the reception they meet with, may be intended as a mark of regard and attention to them; and it has the appearance of ingratitude to blame our friends for their kindness.

But some of us would be better pleased to be treated less sumptuously, and in a way more conformable to the simplicity of our Christian profession! We would not wish to be considered as *avowed epicures*, who cannot dine well without a variety of delicacies—and, if we could suppose, that such cost and variety were designed to remind us how much better we fare abroad than at home—we might think it rather an insult than a compliment. I have known, in some families, the mistress of the house has been, like Martha, too much encumbered with cares and anxieties in making preparation for her friends. They could not see her so soon as they have wished, and, when she has appeared, she could not wholly conceal the discomposure she has felt from some unexpected incident, which has more or less disconcerted the projected arrangement of her feast.

Such things may be common among those who live without God in the world; but they should be carefully avoided by those who make a profession, that, whether they eat or drink—they do all for his glory. Often we cannot avoid the thought, "This dish, unnecessary in itself, or unnecessarily expensive, might have been well spared, and the money given to the poor!" For there is not a day, in which some of the dear people of God do not find a difficulty in providing bread for their children.

Perhaps there is no one circumstance in the history of our Savior so little laid to heart, so generally overlooked, by those who acknowledge him as their Master and their Lord—as that state of poverty to which he submitted, while upon earth. He had no home, he had not a piece of silver to pay his tax; he was hungry when he went to the fig-tree; and when he sat, like a weary, obscure traveler, by the well-side, he was thirsty; he asked for a little water, and seemed upon the point of being refused. He wrought no miracle solely for his own relief; but he felt for the necessitous, and

miraculously fed them by thousands; not with dainties, which would have been equally easy to him—but, finding a few loaves and fish among them, he satisfied their needs without changing their diet. Yes, after his resurrection, when he had taken possession of all power and authority both in heaven and in earth, he condescended to dine with his disciples upon broiled fish and bread, which he likewise provided for them.

Alas! the **rich followers of this poor Savior** have more reason to be ashamed of their gorgeous apparel, their fine houses, their elegant furniture, and their sumptuous feastings, than to value themselves upon such trifles! They are unavoidable appendages to people in some situations; but, I believe, those who have drank deeply into our Lord's spirit, account them rather burdens than benefits.

I know several people, whose ability to do much more in this way if they pleased, than they do, is not disputed; and whose acknowledged benevolence and bounty secure them from the suspicion of being restrained by covetousness. I have often wished that a number of these would form themselves into a society, for the express and avowed purpose of discountenancing, by their example and influence, that *sinful, shameful conformity to the world*, which spreads like a gangrene, is the reproach of the gospel, and threatens the utter extinction of vital religion in multitudes who profess it.

On Female Dress

Women who profess godliness, and who have the care of young people of their own gender, are perhaps in no point more blamable, than in the *example* which some of them set, and the liberty which perhaps a greater number allow, of undue conformity to the world, in the article of 'dress'. Few ministers touch upon this subject in their public discourses; and indeed, it is not very easy to treat it with propriety from the pulpit. Yet whatever is unsuitable to the Christian profession, whatever is an inlet to temptation and productive of evil consequences, should in some way or other be dealt with, by those who have the honor of the gospel, and the welfare of their fellow-creatures at heart. I make no further apology, for offering a few hints, which I hope will not give offence, and which I pray, so far as they are agreeable to the Holy Scripture, and confirmed by experience and observation, may be attended to.

I have no doubt that many godly parents who desire to see their children brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, give them many excellent lessons in the nursery. They endeavor to impress their tender minds with a sense of their sinful state by nature, of the evil of pride, and of the vanity of the world. But, when their children begin to appear in public view, for lack of due reflection, or resolution, or both, they either encourage, or at least permit them, to form habits, which have a direct tendency to counteract all the benefits which might otherwise be hoped for, from the instruction of their early years.

I am certainly no connoisseur in the article of 'dress'; but I know how I am affected by what I see—and I can hear what other people say. A

simple neatness, according to different situations in life, seems a tolerable definition of a befitting dress.

But Christian women should aim to comply with the apostle's advice, to adorn themselves in modest apparel, with decency and propriety. When he adds, "Not with gold or pearls or expensive clothes," I do not think it necessary to take this restriction so rigidly, as to affirm, that such ornaments are, universally, and without exception, unlawful. I think this is one of the many expressions in Scripture, which are to be understood in a *comparative* sense. Thus, when our Lord declares, "That unless a man hates parents, wife, children, and his own life—he cannot be my disciple;" we are sure he does not contradict, what, by his authority, is expressly enjoined in many other passages, that we should pay a due regard to our relations. He only teaches us, that whenever our dearest temporal concerns stand in competition with what we owe to Him—they must be given up and renounced.

If clothes are considered merely as a covering for the body, and a defense from the cold, it will be difficult to draw the line, and to determine exactly between what is necessary, and what is superfluous. But it is more for the honor of the gospel, that a woman professing godliness should be distinguished from others, by modesty, sobriety, and good works, than by the shape of her hat, or the color of her garment.

Yet even to ladies of the greatest affluence, who love and fear the Lord, I will venture to suggest a word of caution. To you I say nothing of the expense—you can, as the phrase is, *very well afford it*. And, if in other respects, you are generous and bountiful, ready to distribute, and willing to share—the cost of what you choose to wear is of no great consideration. But a careful attention to 'dress' will cost

you much of what is more valuable than *money*—that is, your precious *time*! It will too much occupy your thoughts, and that at the seasons when you would wish to have them otherwise engaged. And it certainly administers fuel to that latent fire of **pride** and **vanity**, which is inseparable from our fallen nature, and is easily blown up into a blaze!

I hope you will not be among the first of those, who are eager to catch at, and give sanction to every new fashion; nor is it necessary, if the style is decent and modest, that you should be the very last to adopt it. But there should be something in your dress, to indicate, that, though you do not affect a needless and scornful singularity, (which is often the source of censoriousness and envy,) yet your heart is not set upon these little things. If a woman, when going to public worship, looks in the mirror, and contemplates, with a secret self-delight, the figure which it reflects to her view—I am afraid she is not in the frame of spirit most suitable for one, who is about to 'cry for mercy as a miserable sinner'.

There are likewise women, who, we would hope, are pious, and therefore, of course, benevolent. But an attachment to dress, and a desire to approach, as near as they can, to the standard of those who are their superiors in fortune, blunt their compassionate feelings, and deprive them of the usefulness, comfort, and honor—which they might otherwise attain. The expense of their dress is so great, compared with the smallness of their income, that when they have decorated themselves to their mind, they have little or nothing to spare for the relief of the poor. I doubt not—but they take it for granted, that, upon the supposition that our Lord and Savior was again upon earth in a state of poverty and humiliation, as when he walked in the streets of Jerusalem, and they knew that he needed a garment, when they were about to spend their spare money in some

useless piece of finery, they would gladly forego their purpose for the honor of assisting him. But the heart is deceitful. If we live in the neglect of present duty, we have no right to suppose we would act better in different circumstances. He has said, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me." And, if we are inattentive to the needs of those whom he appoints to be his representatives, we cannot be sure that we would be properly attentive to himself, if he was with us in person, and in a low obscure condition.

But I am not so much concerned by observing the materials, as by the *manner* of female dress, by what we call the *fashion*, and the eagerness with which every changing fashion, however improper, is adopted, by people whose religious profession might lead us to hope they had no time to attend to such trifles. If some allowance is to be made for youth on this head, it is painful to see mothers, and possibly sometimes grandmothers, who seem, by the gaudiness and levity of their attire, very unwilling to be sensible that they are growing older!

It may be a sufficient censure of some fashions—to say they are ridiculous. Their chief effect is to disfigure the female form. And perhaps the inventors of them had no worse design, than to make a trial, how far they could lead 'the passive unthinking many' in the path of absurdity. Some fashions, which seem to have been at first designed to hide a personal deformity, have obtained a general prevalence with those who had no such deformity to hide. We are informed, that Alexander had a wry neck, and therefore his courtiers carried their heads on one side, that they might appear to be in the king's fashion. We smile at this servility, in people who lived in Macedonia twenty centuries before we were born; yet it is little less general among ourselves in the present day.

The improprieties of 'the tyranny of fashion' are not simply ridiculous. They are serious evils in a religious view; and, to speak of them in the gentlest terms, they are signs of a careless, inconsiderate spirit, very unsuitable to a professed regard to the gospel. We are required to attend to the things that are lovely and of a good report. Every willful deviation from this rule is sinful. Why should a godly woman, or one who wishes to be thought so, make herself ridiculous, or hazard a suspicion of her character, to please and imitate an ungodly world?

But the worst of all the fashions are those, which are evidently calculated to allure the eyes, and to draw the attention of men. Is it not strange that modest and even pious women should be drawn into an immodest compliance? Yet I have sometimes been in company with ladies of whose modesty I have no doubt, and of whose piety I entertained a good hope, when I have been embarrassed, and at a loss which way to look. They are indeed noticed by the men—but not to their honor nor advantage. The manner of their dress gives encouragement to vile and insidious men, and exposes them to dangerous temptations. Their immodesty has often proved the first step into the road which leads to misery and ruin. They are pleased with the *flattery of the worthless*, and go on without thought, "like a bird flying into a snare, little knowing it would cost him his life!" But honest and sensible men regard their exterior, as a warning signal, not to choose a companion for life, from among people of this light and volatile turn of mind.

How far does the richest dress which studious vanity, can procure from the spoils of birds, beasts, and insects, fall short of the delicate texture and elegance, and the beautiful tints, which we admire in a flower or a butterfly! "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these!" The resemblance is chiefly in the frailty of the

wearer. Soon, and perhaps suddenly—the body, now adorned with so much extravagance and care, must be deposited in the grave, and be food for worms!

An attention to ornament and dress is peculiarly unseasonable at present. The dark aspect of the times rather requires a spirit of humiliation and abasement. The judgments of God are abroad, his hand is lifted up. We know not what is before us—but we have reason to fear dreadful tokens of his displeasure for our national sins. Perhaps the day is coming when the words of the prophet, "Tremble you women that are at ease, be afflicted you careless ones," may be no less applicable to us, than they were to the Israelites of old.

I earnestly request my fair readers carefully to peruse the following: "The LORD will judge the women of Jerusalem, who walk around with their noses in the air, with tinkling ornaments on their ankles. Their eyes rove among the crowds, flirting with the men. The Lord will send a plague of scabs to ornament their heads. Yes, the LORD will make them bald for all to see! The Lord will strip away their artful beauty—their ornaments, headbands, and crescent necklaces; their earrings, bracelets, and veils of shimmering gauze. Gone will be their scarves, ankle chains, sashes, perfumes, and charms; their rings, jewels, party clothes, gowns, capes, and purses; their mirrors, linen garments, head ornaments, and shawls. Instead of smelling of sweet perfume, they will stink. They will wear ropes for sashes, and their well-set hair will fall out. They will wear rough sackcloth instead of rich robes. Their beauty will be gone. Only shame will be left to them." Isaiah 3:16-24

Two Letters to a Friend

Letter 1

August 17, 1776.

My dear friend,

It is indeed natural to us to wish and to plan; and it is merciful in the Lord to *disappoint* our plans, and to *frustrate* our wishes. For we cannot be safe, much less happy—but in proportion as we are weaned from our own wills, and made simply desirous of being directed by his guidance. This truth (when we are enlightened by his Word) is sufficiently familiar to the *judgment*—but we seldom learn to reduce it into *practice*, without being trained awhile in *the school of disappointment*. The schemes we form, look so plausible and convenient, that when they are broken we are ready to say, 'What a pity!' We try again, and with no better success. We are grieved, and perhaps angry, and plan out another, and so on. At length, in a course of time, experience and observation begin to convince us—that we are not more able than we are worthy—to choose aright for ourselves.

Then the Lord's invitation to cast our cares upon him; and his promise to take care of us, then appear valuable. And when we are done with our own planning—his plan in our favor gradually opens, and he does more and better for us than we could either ask or think. I can hardly recollect a single plan of mine, of which I have not since seen reason to be satisfied, that, had it taken place in season and circumstance just as I proposed, it would, humanly speaking, have proved my ruin; or, at least, it would have deprived me of the greater good the Lord had designed for me. We judge of things by their *present appearances*—but the Lord sees them in their *consequences*. If we could do so likewise, we would be perfectly of his mind—but as we cannot, it is an unspeakable mercy that he *will manage for us*, whether we are pleased with his management or not. It is spoken of

as one of his heaviest judgments, when he gives any person or people up to the way of their own hearts, and to walk after their own counsels.

We may indeed admire his patience towards us. If we were blind, and reduced to need a person to lead us—and yet would dispute with him, and direct him at every step—we would probably soon weary him, and provoke him to leave us to find the way by ourselves! But our gracious Lord is long-suffering and full of compassion. He bears with our frowardness—yet he will take methods both to shame and to humble us, and to bring us to a confession that he is wiser than we. The great and unexpected benefit he intends us, by all the discipline we meet with, is to tread down our wills, and bring them into subjection to his. So far as we attain to this, we are out of the reach of disappointment. For when the will of God can please us—we shall be pleased every day, and from morning to night; I mean, with respect to his dealings with us. O the happiness of such a life! I have an idea of it; I hope I am aiming at it—but surely I have not attained it.

SELF is active in my heart, if it does not absolutely reign there. I profess to believe that one thing is needful and sufficient; and yet my thoughts are prone to wander after a hundred more. If it is true, that the light of his countenance is better than life, why am I solicitous about anything else? If he is all-sufficient, and gives me liberty to call him mine, why do I go a begging to creatures for help? If he is about my path and bed; if the smallest, as well as the greatest, events in which I am concerned are under his immediate direction; if the very hairs of my head are numbered; then my care (any farther than a care to walk in the paths of his precepts, and to follow the openings of his providence) must be useless and needless, yes indeed sinful and heathenish, burdensome to myself, and dishonorable to my profession. Let us cast down the load we are unable to carry; and if

the Lord be our Shepherd, refer all, and trust all to him. Let us endeavor to live to him and for him today, and be glad that tomorrow, with all that is behind it, is in his hands.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain!" 1 Timothy 6:6. It befits every Christian to say—It is not necessary for me to be rich—or what the world accounts wise. It is not necessary for me to be healthy—or admired by my fellow-worms. It is not necessary for me to pass through life in a state of prosperity and outward comfort. These things may be, or they may not be—as the Lord in His wisdom shall appoint them for me.

But it is necessary for me to be humble and spiritual, to seek communion with God, to adorn my profession of the Gospel, and to yield submissively to His disposal, in whatever way, whether of service or suffering—that He shall be pleased to call me to glorify Him in this world. It is not necessary for me to live long—but highly expedient that while I do live—I should live unto Him! Here then, I would bound my desires; and here, having His Word both for my rule, I am secured from asking amiss. Let me have His presence, wisdom to know my calling, and opportunities and faithfulness to improve them; and as to the rest, Lord, help me to sincerely pray, Whatever You will, whenever You will, and however You will. "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want!" Philippians 4:11-12

Letter 2

"Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place—because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy!" Micah 2:10

My dear friend,

What a poor, uncertain and dying world is this! What a wilderness in itself! Without the saving knowledge of Jesus—how dark, how desolate it is! It does not appear to us thus, before we were saved—because we were then in a state of enchantment, the magical lantern blinding us with a splendid delusion!

It is a great mercy to be undeceived in time; and though our mirthful dreams are at an end, and we awake to everything that is disgusting and dismaying—yet we see a highway through the wilderness, and a powerful and infallible Guide at hand to conduct us through it! And we can discern, beyond the limits of the wilderness—a better land, where we shall be at rest and at home!

What will the difficulties we met along the way—then signify? The remembrance of them will only remain to heighten our sense of the love, care, and power of our Savior and Leader! O how shall we then admire, adore, and praise Him—when He condescends to unfold to us—the beauty, propriety, and harmony of the whole train of His providential dealings with us—and give us a clear retrospect of all the way, and all the turns of our earthly pilgrimage!

In the mean while, the best method of adorning our profession, and of enjoying peace in our souls—is simply to trust Him, and absolutely to commit ourselves and our all to His wise and loving management. By casting our burdens upon Him—our hearts become light and cheerful. We are then freed from a thousand anxieties and worries—which are wearisome to our minds, and which are needless for us—yes, even useless!

But though it may be easy to speak of this confident trust in our Father's care, and it appears to our judgment perfectly right and reasonable—the actual attainment this confident trust, is a great but rare thing! And especially so as to trust the Lord not by fits and starts, surrendering one day and retracting the next—but to abide by our surrender, and live habitually trusting Him, through all the changes and vicissitudes we meet with—knowing that His love, purpose, and promise—are wise, good, and unchangeable!

Perhaps none of us are freed from some occasional fainting times. But the trusting of the Lord in good measure at all times, and living quietly under the shadow of His wing—is what His promise warrants us to expect by a gradual increase—if we seek it by diligent prayer. May it be your experience and mine!

Twenty-one letters to friends

(To Mr. and Mrs. W ____ .)

Letter 1

To Mr. W ____ .

January 25, 1766

Dear friend,

You have lately been in the *furnace*—and are now brought safely out. I hope you have much to say of the grace, care, and skill of the great Refiner, who watched over you; and that you have lost nothing but your dross. Let this experience be treasured up in your hearts for the

use of future times. Other trials will come; but you have found the Lord faithful to his promise, and have good encouragement to trust him again.

I would take the liberty to address myself particularly to your dear wife, upon a theme my heart is well acquainted with. You know your *weak* side; endeavor to set a *double guard* of prayer there. Our earthly comforts would be doubly sweet, if we could but venture them without anxiety, into the Lord's hands. Where else can we lodge them so safely? Is not the first gift, the continuance, and the blessing which makes them pleasing—all from *him*? Was not his design in all this—that we should be happy in them? How then can we fear that he will threaten them, much less take them away—but with a view to our further benefit? Let us suppose the thing we are most afraid of, actually to happen. Can it come a moment sooner, or in any other way, than by his perfect appointment? Is he not *gracious* and *faithful* to support us under the severe stroke? Is he not *rich* enough to give us something better—than ever he will take away? Is not the light of His countenance better than life, and all its most valued enjoyments? Is not this our time of *trial*, and are we not traveling towards a land of light?

Methinks, when we *view things in the light of eternity*—that it is much the same whether the separating stroke arrives at the end of *seven*—or *seventy* years; since, come when it will, it must and will be felt! But one draught of the river of pleasure at God's right hand will make us forget our sorrows forever; or the remembrance, if any, will only serve to heighten our joys. Further, what life did he lead whom we call our Master and our Lord? Was not he a *man of sorrows* and acquainted with grief? Has he marked out one way to heaven with his painful footsteps—and shall we expect, or even wish, to walk in another path? With such considerations as these, we should

endeavor to arm our minds, and pray to the Lord to fix a sense of them in our hearts, and to renew it from time to time; that, when changes are either feared or felt, we may not be like the people of the world, who have no hope, no refuge, no throne of grace—but may be enabled to glorify our God in the fire, and give proof that his grace is sufficient for us in every state.

It is neither comfortable for ourselves, nor honorable to our profession, to startle at every shaking leaf. If we are sensible of this, mourn over our infirmities before the Lord, and faithfully strive in prayer against the fear that easily besets us—he can, and he will, strengthen us with strength in our souls, and make us more than conquerors, according to His sure promise.

A proneness to idolatry is our bosom sin—I have smarted for it. I dare not say I am cured; yet I would hope the Lord's wonderful mixture of *comforts* and *chastisements* have not been wholly lost upon me—but have been accompanied with some measure of his sanctifying grace. At present, that is, ever since my settlement here, I have been favored with an interval of *ease*. I never had so long and general an exemption from sharp trials. When I consider and feel what I am, I am amazed at his forbearance. Surely I deserve to be visited with breach upon breach. But his compassions are infinite! Yet I must not expect to have always fair weather in such a sinful and changeable world. I would desire neither to presume that my mountain stands strong, nor yet to afflict myself with needless apprehension of what a day may bring forth. Oh, that I could improve the present, and cheerfully commit the *future* to him who does all things wisely and well, and has promised that all shall work together for good!

I am your very affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 2

To Mrs. W ____ .

March 8, 1766

My dear madam,

When I sent you my well-meant, though free, advice in my last letter, I was little aware how soon I would be called to *practice my own lesson!* However, upon trial, I can confirm what I then said, and assure you, upon new and repeated experience, that the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knows those who put their trust in him. The Lord has been pleased to put us in the fire; but, blessed be his name, we are not burnt. Oh, that we may be brought out refined, and that the outcome may be to the praise of his grace and power! My wife was taken ill on Monday the 24th of February; and from that day to last Wednesday, was a sharp season. But let me not forget to tell you, that this visitation was accompanied with spiritual supports both to her and to myself. I hope we may say, the Lord drew near in the day of distress, and gave us some degree of peaceful resignation to his will. Yet the evil heart of impatience and unbelief had room to show itself, (I speak for one,) and I have the greatest reason to lie ashamed in the dust, and cry "Unclean, unclean!" But truly God is good; he considers our frame; he remembers that we are but dust—he delights in mercy, and therefore we are not consumed.

I believe the Lord gave our dear people a remarkable tenderness of spirit to sympathize with us, and to strive in prayer as one man our behalf. Oh, what a privilege it is to have the prayers of those who fear the Lord! James 5:15. I hope I shall consider her recovery in this view—as the effect of fervent prayer. May it likewise prove an occasion of much praise to a prayer-hearing God.

May my soul learn by what I have lately felt, and may you and yours learn, at a cheaper rate—to keep closer to the Lord than ever. After all, this is but a reprieve—separation, sooner or later, must take place. *The day must come when all creature-comforts shall vanish. And when we view things in the light of eternity—it seems comparatively of small importance whether it is this year—or twenty years hence.* If we are savingly interested in the covenant of grace; if Jesus is our beloved, and heaven our home; we may be cast down for a little season—but we cannot be destroyed; nay, we shall not be overpowered. Our faithful God will surely make our *strength* equal to our *day*; he who has delivered, and does deliver, will deliver to the end; and it will not be long before he will wipe away all tears from our eyes. Therefore let us not fear—whatever *sufferings* may be yet appointed for us, they shall work together for our good; and they are but *light* and *momentary*, in comparison of that exceeding and eternal weight of glory to which we are drawing nearer every hour!

Well, the day is coming when all the Lord's people who are scattered abroad, who praise him in different ages and different languages, shall be collected together, and stand with one heart, consent, and voice before the throne! Oh, the glorious assembly! How white are their robes! How resplendent their crowns! How melodious their harps! Every hour the chorus is augmented by the accession of fresh voices; and before long *we* hope to join them! Then shall we remember the way by which the Lord led us through this dark wilderness world; and shall see that all our afflictions, our heaviest afflictions, were tender mercies—no less than our most pleasing comforts. What we shall then see, it is now our privilege and duty to believe.

Believe me to be, dear madam, your most affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 3

To Mrs. W ____ .

July 24, 1766

Very dear madam,

I am truly glad that you and your husband go on comfortably. For so I trust you do upon the whole, notwithstanding the incidental workings of unbelief and temptation. These, like fits of the tooth-ache, though troublesome, are not mortal; and only give us painful but necessary conviction—of the need we have of a compassionate and almighty Physician. They are like winds to the trees, which threaten to blow them down—but in reality, by bowing them every way, loosen the ground about them, circulate the sap, and cause them to strike their roots to a greater depth, and thereby secure their standing. If a tree were to grow all upwards, and the roots not to enlarge in proportion to the branches, it would be blown flat upon the ground by the first storm. It is equally unsafe for a believer to be top-heavy; and therefore the Lord suits and changes his dispensations, that, as they increase in gifts, knowledge, judgment, and usefulness, they may grow downwards likewise, and increase in *humility*.

Since we have been enabled to put ourselves in his hands, let us hold to our surrender, and leave him to carry on his work in his own way. It is a commonly received maxim, that if a short-sighted, feeble man were to have the distribution of the *weather*, we would have but poor harvests. But, indeed, we are as well qualified to direct and manage the *seasons* of the year—as we are to prescribe what dispensations are more proper to promote the *growth of grace* in our souls. Rejoice, therefore, my dear friends—that you are God's husbandry.

The early and the latter *rain*, and the cheerful beams of the *Sun* of Righteousness, are surely promised to ripen your souls for glory—but *storms* and *frosts* likewise are useful and seasonable in their places, though we perhaps may think we could do better without them. In our bright and lively frames—we learn what God can do for us; in our dark and dull hours—we feel how little we can do without him! Both are needful to perfect our experience and to establish our faith.

At one time we are enabled to rejoice in God; at another we are seeking after him sorrowing. These *different seasons* are equally good in their turns, though not equally comfortable; and there is nothing we need fear but carnal security, carelessness, and presumption. To think ourselves rich and increased with goods, or to suppose we are safe a moment longer than while depending upon Jesus—would be dangerous. Let us beg the Lord to keep us from such a mistake; and, as to the rest, we shall do well. Let us be faithful and diligent in the use of all appointed means, especially in secret exercises—and then leave him to lead us as he pleases. And, though our path should be through the fire or through the water, we may trust his power and love to bring us safely through, and at last to fix us in a wealthy place, where our *warfare* and *tears* shall cease forever!

I am, dear madam, your very affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 4

To Mr. W ____ .

July 9, 1767

My dear sir,

I congratulate you on that comfortable declaration, "We have an

Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who now appears in the presence of God for us." An awful cause we had to manage in the court of heaven; and, when we expected to be asked what we could say, that judgment should not be given and executed speedily against us, we were speechless and without plea. We could not deny the fact, or offer the least amends. We could neither *stand* nor *flee*. But, since Jesus has been pleased to take our affairs in hand, how are appearances changed! The law is fulfilled, justice satisfied, and heaven opened to those who were upon the brink of despair and destruction! And Jesus did not plead for us once only—but he "ever lives to make intercession for us." Let us then take courage.

"Therefore He is able to save to the *uttermost*, those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them!" Hebrews 7:25. That word, *uttermost* includes all that can be said. Take an estimate of all our *sins*, all our *temptations*, all our *difficulties*, all our *fears*, and all our *backslidings* of every kind—still the word *uttermost* goes beyond them all. And, since He ever lives to make intercession, since He is the righteous one who is always heard, since His promise and compassions are unchangeable—He is indeed able and willing, and determined, to save us even to the *uttermost*! "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand!" John 10:28

This point being comfortably settled, that he will neither cast us off himself, nor suffer any to pluck us out of his hands—but that he will surely bring us, through fire and through water, to the wealthy place his love has provided for us; the next important inquiry is, since we may hope for heaven at the end—how may we attain as much of heaven along the narrow way, as is possible to be hoped for in this defiled state of things? Do we indeed, through grace, hope to *live* with Jesus hereafter? then surely we desire to *walk* with him here.

When I speak of **walking with Jesus**, my idea is helped by considering how it was with His first disciples. They lived in His presence. While He stayed in a place—they stayed; and, when He moved—they went with Him. Having Him thus always near, always in view—the sight of Him undoubtedly gave a composure to their whole behavior; and was a check upon their eyes, their tongues, and their actions!

When they had difficulties and hard questions upon their minds—they did not puzzle themselves with vain reasonings. When they were in need—they looked to Him for a supply. And when in danger, knowing that He was with them—they little doubted of deliverance. Now, I need a faith that shall have such an abiding, experimental conviction of His nearness and presence—as if I actually saw Him!

Surely, if He were now upon earth, and I expected a visit from Him this afternoon—my heart would bound at the thought! With what a mixture of joy and fear would I open the door to receive Him! How cautious should I be—not to do or say anything that might grieve Him, and shorten His stay with me! And how gladly, if He gave me permission to speak, would I catch the opportunity of telling Him all my concerns! Surely I would be unwilling to let Him go—until He had healed the wounds in my soul, and renewed my spiritual strength; until He had taught me better how to serve Him, and promised to support me in His service. And if I heard Him say, with an audible voice, "Though they fight against you—they shall not prevail, for I am always with you to deliver you!" I would bid adieu to fear! "Be sure of this: I am with you always—even to the end of the age!" Matthew 28:20

But, alas, my unbelieving heart! Are these things not true, even at present? Is He not as near and as kind? Have I not the same reasons

and the same encouragement to set Him always before me, and to tell Him all my needs, my fears, and my dangers—as if I saw Him with my bodily eyes! From hence it appears with what propriety the Christian life is called the *life of faith*, and from hence likewise it too plainly appears, that, though I am by office called to teach others, I have need to be taught myself the first and plainest principles of my profession. Lord, increase my faith!

I am, with great sincerity, dear sir, your most obliged and affectionate servant,

Letter 5

To Mr. W ____ .

October 2, 1767

Dear sir,

It is because I love you, that I rejoice to think you are in the Lord's hands—and that I desire to leave you there. Happy is the state of a believer; to such, *all things* are for good. **Health** is a blessing, a great mercy, enabling us to relish the comforts of life, and to be useful in our generation. But **sickness** is a greater mercy to the children of God; for it is and shall be sanctified—to wean us more from the present world, to stir up our thoughts and desires heavenward, to quicken us to prayer, and to give us more opportunity of knowing the sweetness and suitableness of the promises, and the power and wisdom of a promise-performing God!

Troubles have many uses—when the Lord is pleased to work by them for the good of His children. And are necessary, because we would miss the meaning and comfort of a great part of the Bible without them! I hope the Lord blesses you both with a measure of submission

to His will, confidence in His love—and then, with respect to other things you will say, All is well!

"In this world you will have trouble!" John 16:33. *Uncertainty* and *brevity* are written upon all below. Therefore may we be enabled both to weep and rejoice—as those who know that we shall not be here in this world very long! By the Lord's goodness, it is appointed both for you and for us, to have more temporal happiness in possession than the greatest part of mankind have in idea; and yet our *best* here would be a *poor all*, if it was indeed our all. We should be thankful for present things; but, oh, what greater thankfulness for spiritual blessings—for pardon, peace, and eternal life! Our gourds must wither one day—but our heavenly portion will be ours forever. Jesus, the fountain, will be full—when every creature-stream will be dried up! Jesus, the fountain, will be full, when every creature-stream will be dried up!

His presence with us, is now sufficient to comfort us under all the pains, losses and trials—which we can either feel or fear. But still, it will not appear by all that he will give or show us in the present life, what we shall be when we see him as he is, and are made perfectly like him. Oh, then, let us rejoice in the Lord, and welcome every painful trouble, knowing and believing that all we receive, is conveyed to us by infinite love and unerring wisdom!

B ____ has been sick near unto death; we know not how to spare her, as she is very useful in her situation, and has been often made (though without her intending or observing it) a teacher to me. The Lord has heard prayer on her behalf, and she is raised up again. I look upon our mature believers here—as *misers look upon their gold*—with a mixture of pleasure and pain. I am daily apprehensive that some of them will be called home; but I long and pray that, before

they are removed, others may be raised up to supply their places. I wish I took this more to heart.

The work seems (so far as it comes under my knowledge) much at a stand-still as to new awakenings and conversions. I trust you will pray for us, that the arm of the Lord may be revealed. Things go on comfortably in our church—I can see some grow; and I think there are few of them with whom I am not better satisfied than with myself. *My spiritual coldness and stupidity when I am retired out of sight—is amazing!* Blessed be the Lord, I hope I can say, it is burdensome, and robs me of much of the comfort I might otherwise enjoy in the many blessings the Lord affords me.

But why should I weary you with my complaints? Let us turn our thoughts to Jesus! In him we have peace, wisdom, righteousness, and power! He knows our weakness, wants, and temptations—and is every way a suitable High Priest and Savior! May the Lord give you a sense of his love while you are reading this. May his *peace* rest in your hearts, and his *presence* dwell in your house. May your children all be taught of God, and become the servants of Jesus. May we all be daily growing in his knowledge and grace, be guided by his counsel through the present life, and at last meet in glory! Believe that our hearts are with you, and that we have an affectionate sense of all your kindness, particularly in coming to see us.

I am your affectionate and obliged,

Letter 6

To Mrs. W ____ .

October 31, 1767

My dear friend,

I hear that you still continue very sick. Shall I say that I am sorry? I hope this is allowable—as we have in the sympathizing Savior—the best example and authority to sympathize with suffering friends.

Yet our sorrow should be mixed with joy, for we are directed to rejoice always in the Lord. Always—not only when we are well—but when we are sick! I rejoice, therefore, that you are in safe hands; in the hands of Him whom you love best—and who best loves you! You need not fear that He will lay more upon you, than you are able to bear—for He has engaged his faithfulness to the contrary.

I trust this sickness of your body is, and shall be, for the health of your soul. Yes, perhaps even now, if you were able to write, you would tell me that, as your afflictions abound—so your consolations in Christ do much more abound. All the fruit of your affliction, shall be to take away sin! Therefore be of good courage. We count them happy and blessed—whom the Lord chastises. He deals with you as His child. He intends this painful dispensation to revive in you a sense of the uncertainty and vanity of all things here below; to give you a nearer and closer perception of the importance of unseen realities; to afford you the honor of greater conformity to Jesus, who went through sufferings—to the kingdom.

But how different were His sufferings—from yours! There is no sting in your rod, nor wrath in your cup! Your pains and infirmities do not cause you to sweat blood, nor are you left to cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"

Then, again, our trials are *mixed* with abundance of temporal mercies—which appear exceedingly valuable to those who feel the lack of them, and have a load of *poverty* to struggle with, superadded to grievous *pains* and *sicknesses*. But, especially, *spiritual* mercies.

In a time of sickness, we may see in the strongest light—the privilege of being a believer, to have a right to cast ourselves and our all upon the covenant mercies of a God in Christ.

Sickness is a bitter evil indeed—to those who have no gracious God to go to; who can have no relief from their earthly friends, and yet know not where else to apply either for patience or deliverance.

When you meditate on these things, I trust you find your heart sweetly composed into a frame of resignation to bear, as well as to do—the will of your heavenly Father; and, though your recovery may be slow, and your physicians shake their heads, as uncertain what to try for you—yet, when the fit time is come, the great Physician who has taken charge of your case, can heal you immediately. Diseases hear his voice. To the Lord our God belong the issues of life and death. I pray as I am enabled, for your recovery at the best season—but especially that the *rod may be sanctified*, and you brought forth from the furnace refined as gold. "I will bring this third through the fire and make them pure, just as gold and silver are refined and purified by fire!" Zechariah 13:9

I sympathize likewise with your dear husband; nay, perhaps he is more to be pitied than you. You know what you feel—but his affection will be apt to aggravate every circumstance, and *his imagination be busy in painting foreboding scenes* which I hope will not yet take place. I know what it is, by repeated experience, to watch night and day with anxiety over a life in many respects dearer to me than my own. I have been a long student in this school, and can tell you, my dear sir, by experience, that the Lord our God is faithful and merciful. When he makes two people happy in a mutual affection, he sees now and then a *need-be* to put their faith and patience to a trial, and to quicken them to prayer by *touching them where they are*

most sensible! Hereby he humbles us for the idolatry, unbelief, and ingratitude of our hearts. But he pities us still, and takes occasion from our distresses, to make the suitableness and seasonableness of his mercy and power more clearly manifested.

Some time ago, this was my trial. I know that you then bore a friendly part with me, and remembered me at the throne of grace. I hope I shall now do my best to repay your labor of love.

I wish we may learn never think ourselves either safe or happy—but when we are beholding the glory of Christ by the light of faith—in the looking-glass of the Gospel. To view him as God manifest in the flesh, as all in all in Himself, and all in all for us—this is cheering, this is strengthening, this makes hard things easy, and bitter things sweet. This includes all I can wish for you—that you may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

To know Jesus—is the shortest description of true grace.

To know Jesus better—is the surest mark of growth in grace.

To know Jesus perfectly—is eternal life!

This is the prize of our heavenly calling! This is the sum and substance of all we can desire or hope for is—to see Jesus as He is, and to be like Him! He will surely bring all who sincerely love Him, to this honor and happiness. We need not think much of the difficulty of any way—which leads to this blessed end!

I am, with a sincere regard, your most affectionate friend and obliged servant.

Letter 7

To Mr. W ____ .

October 29, 1768

My dear sir,

I hope that your souls prosper; that the Lord hears from you—and you from him often; and that you both live a life of faith in the Son of God, are strong in his might, and comforted by refreshing views of his glory. "Looking unto Jesus—the author and finisher of our faith!" Hebrews 12:2. The great secret of the Christian life—is to be looking unto Jesus! (Oh, that I could learn it better!)

I am a stranger to that court; but I am told that those who wait there form themselves into little parties, have their own conversation, or make their remarks upon what passes, until the king appears; then everything is hushed and dropped, and their attention is fixed upon him alone. Oh, that thus by the eye of faith—we might obtain such a sight of the glory, beauty, and love of King Jesus, as might unite our scattered thoughts, and attract all our powers and affections to himself. But, alas! we are prone (at least I may speak for myself) to forsake the fountain of living waters, and to hew out broken cisterns. Instead of receiving him, I am often looking in myself for something to enable me to do without him, or at least for something to strengthen the warrant he has given me in his word to come to him. May the Lord be merciful to my unbelief and slowness of heart. Though taught and warned again and again, I am frequently repeating the old mistake—and seeking the living among the dead.

I have some faint idea of the *life of faith*, and can talk a little about it; but to experience myself the power of what I preach to others, this is too often what I find not. Yet I must praise him; if I did not, might not the very stones cry out and shame me! for surely he has dealt

marvelously with me. He found me in a waste howling wilderness; in more than the prodigal's distress, with my heart full of madness and rebellion, and beset with horror on every side. In this state I was when he first passed by me, and bid me "live!" He sent from on high, and delivered me out of deep waters. And, oh, what has he not done for me since! given me to *know*, yes, to *preach*, his Gospel; and to cast my lot in a pleasant place! He has filled and surrounded me with mercies on every side; and spoken good concerning me for a great while to come, even forever and ever. Praise the Lord, O my soul! Come, my dear friends, and magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!

I am, my dear friend, your most affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 8

To Mr. W ____ .

July 8, 1769

My dear sir,

I have been thinking of you and yours upon my knees, and would be thankful for the information I had yesterday from Mr. ____ , that the Lord is raising you up again. Indeed, I have heard that, in your illness, you were favored with such sweet foretastes of the glory that shall be revealed, that death appeared to you not only disarmed of its sting—but a very *desirable* messenger; and that you had strong hopes that the hour of your release was at hand. In such a frame it is no wonder that you longed to depart and be with Christ; yet, as many will have cause to rejoice at your recovery, I hope you likewise are made sweetly reconciled to life, and willing to wait and suffer yet a little longer, if by any means the Lord shall be pleased to honor you with usefulness in your station.

If we look to ourselves only, and consider our immediate interest, who that has a good hope through grace would not wish to be out of this wilderness world, and at home in our Father's house, where all temptations and enemies shall be shut out, and we shall enjoy the unclouded light of his countenance forever, without the least abatement or interruption! But Paul, though he had been taken up into the third heaven, and knew more of the state of glorified spirits than was perhaps ever vouchsafed to a child of Adam; and though from the *tastes* he had received, he had very strong desires to be at the fountain head—yet was content to defer the *full possession of his happiness* a little longer, if in the mean time the Lord would be pleased to make him serviceable to his church and people.

At the longest, the time is short: ten, or twenty, or fifty years, is but a *span* in comparison to the *eternity* that awaits us. And, though we would weep all the while—yet our tears before long will be wiped away. If we consider this life chiefly with respect to the things which make up a great part of it, as eating, drinking, buying, selling, putting on our clothes, and putting them off—a spiritual mind may well be weary of such a train of *necessary trifling*. But even the common actions of life are sanctified, and become apart of our acceptable service, when performed in a spirit of faith, love, and dependence.

This life, as poor as it is in itself, will become exceedingly important in one view. It is the only opportunity we have to hold forth the power of gospel truth in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, to show our readiness to bear the cross, and to tread in the steps of a suffering Savior, and to be subservient to the promoting his cause, and the encouragement of his people. Many of our years were wasted in the *service of sin* before we knew the Lord; and, though they are happy who are taken out of this vain world soon after their conversion—yet I think they are more honored, who are

preserved to bear a testimony to his goodness, and to be useful in their generation for a course of years. Therefore, though, if the Lord had seen fit to remove you, you would have escaped some trials which in this world you will be sure to meet with, and would have had your hungering after Jesus abundantly satisfied; yet upon the account of your dear wife and children, your place in the church and in the world, as well as upon my own account—I cannot but rejoice that there is a prospect of your continuance longer on this side the grave!

When I look at the state of the land, I know not how to spare one praying person. They are the chariots and the horsemen of our Israel; and I hope you will live to be an earnest and prevalent pleader in behalf of a sinful people.

It is a happy and most desirable state—to be ready and willing either to live or die, and to be enabled so absolutely to give ourselves up to the Lord's disposal as to have no choice of our own either way—but only intent upon improving today, and cheerfully to leave tomorrow and all beyond it in his hands who does all things well. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." Philippians 1:21-24

I am, dear sir, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 9

To Mr. W ____ .

December 2, 1769

My dear sir,

I know our hearts are all alike by nature; but I have reason to believe that the general tenor of your experience is very different from mine; yes, you tell me so yourself. Through mercy, I am favored with *day-light* which is sufficient to see by; but the *sunshine*, in which many of God's people rejoice, is not my portion. An *evil heart of unbelief* fills my sky with many clouds; and though, so far as the foundations of faith and hope are concerned, I can and do rejoice, believing that the Lord has loved me with an unchangeable, everlasting love, and that he will surely do me good; yet I am one way or another so beset and cramped in my soul, that, as to my frames, I often for the most part go mourning all the day long. I trust I have the name of a *child* in the Lord's family—yet I may fitly compare myself to a *servant*; for I set forth many a dish to my Master's guests, of which (to my own apprehension) I am not allowed to taste. The Lord supports, yes, he owns me, in my public work; he graciously keeps me in my outward walk—these are unspeakable mercies. Oh, that I could praise him more on account of them! But, as to the state of things between him and my own soul—alas! I could write a scroll that, like Ezekiel's, would be full of mourning, lamentation, and woe!

Well, he best knows why it is his pleasure that I should live at such a distance, as to *sensible communion*. He has a right to do what he will with his own; and, so far as his sovereignty and wisdom are concerned, I desire to submit. If he is pleased to accept my worthless name, to own my feeble services, to preserve me from the errors of the times, and to keep me from being a scandal to my profession; though he appoints me a wearisome conflict with indwelling sin, still I ought to praise him. Before long, this conflict will be over; I shall not always be burdened with this body of death. Only I pray that,

whether I enjoy the light of his countenance or not, at least I may desire it, and thirst after it as the deer pants after the water-brook, and feel an emptiness in all earthly things without it. If my soul is not satisfied with him as with marrow and fatness, I pray that it may not be satisfied, or taken up with anything short of him. Rather let the whole world appear like a wilderness to me, than that I should be content that the Comforter who should comfort my soul is at a distance from me.

In the mean time, as I have but a small portion of spiritual consolation, so I am not much exposed to the fiery darts and black temptations of Satan. He fights against me, it is true, and too often gains advantage; but he is not allowed to come upon me in a way of storm and terror, as he is against many. Neither have I outward trials worth mentioning. I believe the Lord keeps a kind of balance with his people: afflictions and comforts are set one against the other; and perhaps this may be one reason why I am led thus. My day at present is easy, and therefore my strength is but small. If he should at any time call me to harder service, I may depend upon his faithfulness and care to administer proportionate support.

Adored be the grace that has enabled us to make the choice of Moses, and to prefer even the afflictions and exercises of the people of God, to all the seeming pleasures of a blinded world. The *weeping of believers* is happier than the *mirth of careless sinners*. I can heartily say, Let not my soul eat of their dainties! My first desire would be, to rejoice in the Lord's presence; but, until this is granted, I would make it my second to go mourning after him until I find him.

And may the Lord give to my dear friends who have a more sensible enjoyment of His love, a proportionate measure of a humble and watchful spirit, that you may abide in his light continually.

I am your much obliged servant.

Letter 10

To Mr. W ____ .

December 16, 1770

My dear sir,

Blessed be God, that he has given us the beginnings of the *life of faith*, and that he has favored us with any growth. But there is an unsearchable fullness, a rich treasure, which can never be exhausted; and we have as yet received but little of the Lord in comparison of what he has yet in reserve for us.

May not a believer be taught something by what we frequently observe of the men of the world? Perhaps, when such a one first enters upon business in a little narrow way, he is in some measure content with a moderate income, and thinks himself happy if, at the end of the year, he can pay his debts, and, as the saying is, *make both ends meet*. But by-and-by his business enlarges, his trade increases, his hundreds become thousands; then he thinks little of his former small way, he pushes all his interests, and strikes into new branches. He began with a view to a *maintenance*—but now he pushes for a great fortune, and, like the insatiable fire, the more he gets—the more he craves! Well, let the world have the world; the whole of it can make but a *poor all*. However, the Lord grant that you and I may be thus wise in our generation.

I remember, when the Lord first *set me up*, (if I may so speak,) my heavenly trade lay in a small compass, my views were very narrow; I wanted to be saved, and, alas! I hardly looked further than a bare subsistence and security! But, since the Lord has been pleased in a

measure to bless me, I hope I feel a desire of being rich. May I, and all whom I love, be thus minded; not be satisfied that we have *life*—but labor in His appointed way, that we may have it *more abundantly*; not only to *believe*—but to be *strong* in faith; not only to *hope*—but to *rejoice* in hope; not only to *desire*—but to hunger, and thirst, and pant; to open our mouths wide, that we may be filled with his goodness, as well as taste that he is gracious!

Oh, what a happiness it is—to be lively and thriving in the ways of God; to drink into the spirit of Jesus, and to walk with that simplicity, dependence, and heavenly-mindedness which befit a son or a daughter of the Lord Almighty. I trust the Lord has given me thus to will; but, when I would do good—evil is present with me. On this account, our life is a warfare; and it is never well with us—but when we find it to be a warfare. But we have a good Captain, good armor, good provisions, infallible balm to heal our wounds, and (what one would think might make even a coward fight) are assured of the victory beforehand. I shall be glad to hear the success of your last campaign. I trust you have been enabled, in the Lord's strength, to put some of your enemies to flight; that some *spiritual Goliath* who came out against you, has been cut down by the sword of the Spirit; and that, like Gideon's soldiers of old, you are still pressing on, and, though faint—are yet pursuing.

To be sure, fighting is difficult service—flesh and blood will not much like it. But the time is short, we shall not fight always; we are going where we shall no more hear the voice of war forever. A few battles more, and the King will say to us, *Come near, and set your feet upon the necks of your enemies!* Then the redeemed shall enter into the kingdom with songs of triumph, and shouts of everlasting joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!

As to myself, I have little to say in my own behalf. The Lord has appointed me a sentinel to give the camp notice of the enemy's approach; I am ashamed to say it—but indeed I am such a wretch, that I am sometimes half-asleep upon my post! It is of the Lord's mercy that I have not been surprised and overpowered before now. Such is his condescension, that he comes to awaken me himself, and only says, *Arise, watch, and pray—that you enter not into temptation!* I have good reason to believe my enemy has been as near to me as David was to Saul, when he took away his spear—and yet I did not perceive him. Well it is for us that there is one who *watches the watchmen*, a Shepherd who himself neither *slumbers* nor *sleeps*, and yet knows how to have compassion on those who are prone to do both.

Letter 11

To Mr. W ____ .

April 12, 1771

My dear sir,

I often review my late London visit with much satisfaction; rejoicing that I found so many of my dear friends thriving in the good ways of the Lord. Surely his service is perfect freedom; his ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace. He is a sun and a shield, a hiding-place, and a resting-place, to those who fear him. May we still *press forward*—we have not yet attained. There are larger measures of grace, virtue, and consolation set forth in the Gospel—than all we have hitherto received. The Lord has set before us an open door, which no man can shut; he has given us exceeding great and precious promises; has bid us open our mouths wide, and has said that he will fill them. He would have us ask great things, and, when we have

enlarged our desires to the utmost, he is still able to do exceeding more than we can ask or think.

May we be as wise in our generation as the children of this world. They are not content with a little, nor even with much, so long as there is any probability of getting more. As to myself, I am but a poor man in the *trade of grace*; I live from hand to mouth, and procure just enough (as we say) to keep the wolf from the door. But I must charge it to my unbelief and indolence, which have been so great, that it is a mercy I am not a bankrupt! This would have been the case—but that I have a Friend (whom you know) who has kindly engaged for me. To tell you the plain truth, I have nothing of my own—but trade wholly upon his stock; and yet (would you think it possible) though I often confess to him that I am an unprofitable and unfaithful steward—yet I have upon many occasions spoke and acted as if I would have people believe that what he has committed to me, was my own property! Ah, Sir! if you had a servant like me, that should affect to "display" at your expense, you would hardly bear with him long. You would be ready to say, What is this I hear? Give an account of your stewardship, for you may no longer be my steward.

I learn sometimes, from family relations, to form a little judgment of the Lord's patience towards his people. What a family has He to bear with!

Those whom he has graciously saved, have secret idols in their hearts! His friends hold a secret correspondence with His enemies! His children repine against Him, and quarrel one with another! His servants (ministers) serve themselves! I do not wonder that those who are not well acquainted with the freedom and security of the gospel-covenant, should live in daily fear of being turned out of

doors. I am sure I deserve it every day of my life. But he is God and not man; his ways are not as ours; and, as it has pleased him to receive us as children, he has promised that we shall abide in his house forever. It is our mercy that we have an atonement of infinite value, and an Advocate who is always heard, and who ever lives to make intercession for us. "But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness!" Psalm 86:15. "The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion!" Numbers 14:18

How I have run from one thing to another! But by this means I have got through a good part of my paper. Do you inquire after—? Its present state may be summed up in two sentences—The Lord is gracious, and Satan is busy. The Lord is, I hope, carrying on his work—reviving, healing, sealing, and feeding his people. And I am sure Satan is carrying on his work—some he is leading blindfold up and down the town, and miserable spectacles they are—he is stopping up the ears of others. He is spreading snares and traps in all quarters; so that believers can hardly stir a step without being ensnared. He has taken a professor or two in his toils; and now he seems to laugh at them, and to laugh at us. And all this while he is as assiduous in fighting against the peace of the upright, as if he had nothing else to do. We are a besieged city; and it is not to be conceived, much less expressed, what showers of fiery darts he discharges against us every day! And I am persuaded no army soldier can show so many wounds as some of us have received in conflict with this enemy. However, though he thrusts sore at us, the Lord is our helper. We are kept by the power of God. The banner of salvation still flies upon our walls; and I believe Satan gnashes his teeth at the sight.

I am, dear sir, your much obliged and affectionate servant.

Letter 12

To Mr. W ____ .

December 5, 1771

My dear sir,

I was *disappointed* not to find you at home last Friday. Then I wished I had stayed with you on the Tuesday evening; so ready are we—at least, so ready am I—to want to recall the day that is past, and correct the disposals of Divine Providence. At length I retreated to my acknowledged principles, that the Lord knows where we are, and when it is needful we should meet; that the word *disappointment*, when translated into plain English, means little more or less than the grumbling of self-will against the will of God. We would never meet a disappointment in the path of duty, if we could heartily prefer his wisdom to our own. I considered that, though to have had your company would have been more pleasant—yet an opportunity of trying to bow my stubborn spirit to the Lord's disposal, might at that time be more profitable; so I endeavored to make the best of it.

I am desirous to learn to apply the great truths of the Gospel to the common concerns of every day and every hour. I desire to learn, not only to believe that my soul is safe in the Redeemer's hand—but that the hairs of my head are all numbered! Not only that those events in life which I call important are under His direction—but that those which I account the most inconsiderable are equally so! That I have no more right or power to determine for myself where or how I would spend a single day—than I had to choose the time of my coming into the world or of going out of it! But alas! I am a slow scholar, and make bungling work at my lessons!

Thus I would believe we did not meet according to *our* desire, because it was not *his* pleasure that we should. When he sees it proper that we should come together, he can easily lead you to—, or me to London—though neither of us at present have any prospect of the means by which our determinations may be guided. Oh, would it not be a blessed thing simply to follow him, and to set him by faith always before us! Then we might be freed from anxious cares, and, as I said, out of the reach of disappointment! For, if his will is ours, we may be confident that nothing can prevent its taking place.

When I hire a carriage, I give myself up, with the most absolute confidence, to the driver. He knows the way, and how to manage better than I do; and therefore I seldom trouble him either with questions or directions—but I read a book, and sit at my ease. I wish I could trust the Lord so; but, though I have given myself up to the care of infinite wisdom and love, and, in my judgment, believe they are engaged on my behalf, I am ready to direct my Guide, and to expostulate with him at every turn, and secretly to wish that I had the reins in my own hand! "So stupid and ignorant am I—even as a beast before him!" In great trials we necessarily retreat to him, and endeavor to stay our souls by believing he does all things well; but in small ones we are ready to forget him, and therefore we are often more put out by little things that happen in the course of every day, than by the sharpest dispensations we meet with.

I am, with sincerity, my dear sir, your most obedient, obliged, and affectionate servant.

To Mr. W ____ .

June 2, 1772

My dear sir,

It is true—I confess it. I have been very naughty. I ought not to have been so long in answering your last kind letter. Now I hope you have forgiven me. And therefore I at once recover my confidence without troubling you with such excuses as the *old man*, ever desirous of justifying himself, would suggest. We were glad to hear of your welfare, and of the prosperity with which the Lord favors you at home, and in the two great houses; which, I hope, will continue to be like trees planted by the waters of the sanctuary, maintaining the leaves of Gospel doctrine always green and flourishing, and abounding with a constant succession of *blossoms, green and ripe fruit*; I mean believers in the states of *babes, young men, and fathers* in Christ.

Awake, oh, heavenly wind, and come,
Blow on these gardens of perfume;
Spirit Divine, descend and breathe
A gracious gale on plants beneath!

And, while you are using your best endeavors in watching for the good of these vineyards, may your own flourish. May your soul rejoice in the Lord, and in the success of his work, and every ordinance and providence administer unto you an especial blessing!

The illness under which I have labored so long, is far from being removed. Yet I am bound to speak well of my Physician—He treats me with great tenderness, and bids me in due time to expect a perfect cure. I know too much of Him (though I know but little) to doubt either His skill or His promise.

It is true, I have suffered sad relapses since I have been under His care. Yet I confess, that the fault has not been His—but my own! I am a perverse and unruly patient! I have too often neglected His prescriptions, and broken the regimen He appoints me to observe. This perverseness, joined to the exceeding obstinacy of my disorders, would have caused me to be turned out as an incurable long ago—had I been under any other hand but His! Indeed—there is none like Him! When I have brought myself very low—He has still helped me. Blessed be His name—I am yet kept alive only by means of His perfect care.

Though His medicines are all beneficial—they are not all pleasant. Now and then He gives me a pleasant cordial; but I have many severe disorders, in which there is a needs-be for my frequently taking His bitter and unpalatable medicines!

We sometimes see published in the newspapers, acknowledgments of cures received. Methinks, if I were to publish my own case, that it would run something like this:

"I, John Newton, have long labored under a multitude of grievous disorders:

a fever of ungoverned passions,
a cancer of pride,
a frenzy of wild imaginations,
a severe lethargy, and
a deadly stroke!

In this deplorable situation, I suffered many things from many physicians, spent every penny I had—yet only grew worse and worse!

In this condition, Jesus, the Physician of souls, found me when I sought Him not. He undertook my recovery freely, without money and without price—these are His terms with all His patients! My fever is now abated, my senses are restored, my faculties are enlivened! In a word, I am a new man! And from His ability, His promise, and the experience of what He has already done—I have the fullest assurance that He will infallibly and perfectly heal me—and that I shall live forever as a monument of His power and grace!"

May many, may all, who are sick of the same diseases, be encouraged, by this declaration of my case—to seek Him likewise. For whoever comes unto Him—He will never cast out!"

When will you come and see the flock at ____? By the blessing of the good Shepherd, we have had a good number of lambs added to the fold of late, who are in a very promising way. You would like to hear their bleating. The voice of joy and thanksgiving is heard in our tabernacles, saying, The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord brings mighty things to pass. Pray for us, that these gracious drops may be the forerunners of a plentiful shower. For, notwithstanding what I have said, wickedness still abounds among us in the town. And many, having long resisted the convictions of the Word and Spirit, are hardened and bold in sinning to a great degree. So that ____ is like the two baskets of Jeremiah's figs, the good are very good, and the bad are exceedingly bad.

I am, my dear sir, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 14

To Mr. W ____ .

July 28, 1772

My dear sir,

It was not in my power to reach you after I called upon Mrs. ____ . Indeed, that London is such a noisy, hurrying place—that I wish you would leave it, fill your coach with those whom you love best, and come and spend a few days with us. Here we could chat without interruption, and I could show you a set of promising *young plants*, which have sprung up since you were here last; if you cannot come to look at them—yet I hope you will pray for them, that they may flourish like the palm-tree, and bring forth fruit in old age.

Give my love to Miss ____ . I trust and pray that, wherever she feeds—that the Lord will be her Shepherd, and will lead her in the green pastures of his truth, and cause her to rest by the refreshing streams of his love. We know that he is not confined to names, places, or instruments. There is but one Lord, one faith, and therefore but one church, composed of all who are vitally united to him, and who receive from his fullness, grace upon grace. To him I commend her, and congratulate her upon the privilege that it is given her early in life to know his name, and to feel the constraining power of his grace. In every other respect the Lord has blessed you abundantly; and if he vouchsafes you this blessing also, to see your children, as they grow up, *walking in wisdom's ways*—I doubt not but he will give your hearts to love and praise him for all his goodness. May grace, mercy, and truth be with you all.

We finished our little *travel* in peace, and our return home was crowned with new mercies; but I likewise find the return of my old sins and temptations:
this evil heart of unbelief;
this wicked spirit of SELF;

this stupidity and deadness in the things of God; and
this groveling attachment to the vanities of time and sense.

For these things I groan, being burdened. But we have heard of *One* who is able to save to the uttermost; and we find that his compassions fail not. His arm is not shortened, nor his ear heavy; and, though our many iniquities might justly keep his good things from us—yet still he is gracious. In secret, I am for the most part dull and heartless as usual; but he is pleased to enable me and permit me to speak for him in public. I feel enough to make me frequently utter David's prayer, "O take not your Word of truth utterly out of my mouth!" He might, he might justly do it; he might lay me aside by sickness, or, what is unspeakably more awful, he might take away his gifts from me, and cause my right eye to grow dark, and my right arm to wither. Sometimes I am almost ready to fear the sentence is coming forth—I feel such a total inability, the Scripture a sealed book, and my heart hard as the nether mill-stone. I know not how I shall make mention of his name again; I am ready to sink at the prospect; but it is *he who supports me through all, when I faint, he revives me again.*

In the midst of these exercises, I have reason to hope he blesses the Word of his grace. I have come to the knowledge of three or four more since my return, who have been seeking him for some months past, and appear to have right views and warm hearts. And I have reason to hope that he is at work upon more than I am yet acquainted with. A young woman came to me last night in great distress; when I asked her the cause, she said, "Oh, sir, to think that he died such a death, and that I should sin so against him!" Poor soul, she had no thought of *teaching her teacher*—but what she said, and the simplicity with which she spoke, had almost melted my

heart; though *my stubborn heart* soon got over it, and grew hard again.

Believe me to be sincerely, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 15

To Mr. W ____ .

September 14, 1772

My dear sir,

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it!" Psalm 81:10

You are hungering and thirsting to feel the power and savor of the truth in your soul—humbling, quickening, strengthening, comforting you, filling you with peace and joy, and enabling you to abound in the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Are these your desires? He who has wrought them in you is God; and he will not disappoint you. He would not say, *Open your mouth wide*—if he did not design to fill it. Oh, he gives bountifully—like a king! A little is too much for our deserts; but much is too little for his bounty.

Let me tell you a heathen story. It is said, that a man once asked King Alexander to give him some money for his daughter's wedding. The king bid him go to his treasurer, and demand whatever he pleased. He went, and demanded an enormous sum. The treasurer was startled, and said that he could not part with so much without an express order, and went to the king, and told him he thought a small part of the money the man had named, might serve for the occasion.

"No," said the king, "let him have it all. I like that man—he does me honor—he treats me like a king, and proves by what he asks, that he believes me to be both rich and generous!"

Come, my friend, let us go to the throne of grace, and put up such petitions as may show that we have honorable views of the *riches* and *bounty* of our King! Alas! I have such poor scanty desires, as if I thought Jesus was altogether such a one as myself. Speak a word for me when you are near him; entreat him to increase my love, faith, humility, zeal, and knowledge, a thousand-fold. Ah! I am poor and foolish; I need a great supply; I cannot dig, and yet am often unwilling to beg.

The other day, I met in a friend's house a volume of Mr. Whitfield's Sermons, lately published by Gurney. I have read several of them. They are, indeed, more loose and inaccurate than printed sermons usually are; but I think them the more valuable in one respect on this account, that they give a lively idea of his manner of preaching, which can hardly be guessed at from the sermons formerly printed in his name. But, in these, I cannot read a page but I seem to have the man before my eyes. His voice, his gesture, every particular, returns to my memory, as if I had heard him but yesterday. In this volume, I think it may emphatically be said, He being dead—yet speaks. I should suppose his friends will be glad that this striking picture of him is preserved. Though doubtless the world, who despised his preaching while he lived, will think meanly enough of sermons published just as he preached them.

I am, sincerely, dear sir, your much obliged and affectionate servant.

To Mr. W ____ .

November 14, 1772

My dear sir,

"The human heart is most deceitful—and desperately wicked!" I know but little of my own—and cannot see at all into other people's hearts. This is a day in which the many falls of professors give us warning not to judge too hastily by appearances, to be cautious whom we trust, and especially whom we recommend. However, I have great reason to believe, that you will never have reason to be angry with me for having recommended ____ to you. I have had seven or eight years' trial of him, and judge him to be a simple-hearted, honest man. I account him a good sample of our flock. Most people in our church are somewhat like him: not abounding in that wit which the world calls wisdom; more spiritual than clever, have more grace than politeness, and are more desirous to live above the world—than to be wealthy, or be admired by it. They know the Lord and the truth—but very few of them know much of anything else.

Such are the people whom, for the most part, the Lord chooses and sets apart for Himself—simple, poor, afflicted, and unnoticed in the present world—but rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom of glory!

We jog on here much in our usual way. Only, as our numbers are increased, the enemy has a larger field for action among us, and we have frequent proofs that he is not asleep. However, upon the whole, I trust the Lord is with us, and preserves us from his subtle devices. Of late we have had no new 'awakenings' that I know of; I beg your prayers for us, that the Spirit from on high may be again poured out upon us, to make our wilderness into a fruitful field. Indeed, notwithstanding, the Lord has a few people here, and the preaching of the Gospel abounds so much among us.

Wickedness prevails and increases in our city to a dreadful degree. Our streets are filled with the sons of Belial, who neither fear God, nor regard man. I wish my *heart* was more affected with what my *eyes* see and my *ears* hear every day! I am often ready to fear lest the Lord should testify his displeasure in some awful way; but he is full of mercy, he has a remnant among us, therefore I am willing to hope he will yet spare.

And surely, if he were strict to mark all that is amiss—I myself would tremble! Oh, were he to plead against me, I could not answer him one word! Alas! my dear friend, you know not what a poor, unprofitable, unfaithful creature I am! So much forgiven—yet so little love. So many mercies—yet so few returns. Such great privileges—yet a life so sadly below them. Instead of rejoicing in God—I go mourning for the most part. Not because I am shaken with doubts and fears; for I believe the Lord Jesus, who found me when I sought him not, is both able and willing to save to the uttermost; but because indwelling sin presses me close; because, when I would do good, evil is present with me; because I can attempt nothing—but it is debased, polluted and spoiled by my depraved nature; because my sins of omission are innumerable. In a word, there is so much darkness in my understanding, perverseness in my will, disorders in my affections, folly and madness in my imagination. Alas! when shall it be otherwise? I seem to have a desire of walking with God, and rejoicing in him all the day long; but I cannot attain thereto. Surely it is far better to depart, and to be with Jesus Christ—than to live here up to the ears in sin and temptation! And yet I seem very well contented with the possibility of continuing here a good while. In short, I am a riddle to myself—a heap of inconsistency!

But it is said, "We have an Advocate with the Father." Here my hope revives! Though wretched in myself—I am complete in him! He is my

wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. On this rock I build. I trust it shall be well with me at last, and that I shall by and by praise, and love, and serve him without these abatements.

I am your much obliged servant.

Letter 17

To Mr. W ____ .

April 20, 1773

My dear sir,

It is time to thank you for your kind letter—but I am so busy, that I can hardly pay my *debts of correspondence* in due season. However, I do not like to let yours be long unanswered, because, until I have evened scores, I have but little hopes of hearing from you again. We were glad to hear that you and your wife were well, and to find by your writing, that the Lord makes your feet like hinds' feet in his good ways, and leads you in the paths of pleasantness and peace. I doubt not but you likewise have your share of trials; but, when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit—it sweetens whatever bitter things the Lord puts into our cup, and enables us to say, *None of these things move us!* Yes, the life of *faith* is a *happy* life, and, though attended with *conflicts*, there is an assurance of *victory*. If we sometimes get a *wound*—there is *healing balm* near at hand; if we seem to fall—we are raised again; and, if tribulations abound—consolations shall abound likewise. Is it not happiness to have an infallible Guide, an invincible Guard, an Almighty Friend? —to be able to say of the Maker of heaven and earth, He is my Beloved, my Shepherd, my Savior, and my Husband; and to say to him—

Let waves and thunders mix and roar,
O be my God—I ask no more:
While you are Sovereign, I'm secure,
I shall be rich—until you are poor.

Oh, the peace which flows from believing that all events in which we are concerned, are under his immediate disposal; that the hairs of our head are all numbered; that he delights in our prosperity; that there is a *need-be*, if we are in heaviness; and that all things shall surely work for our good! How happy to have such views of his sovereignty, wisdom, love, and faithfulness, as will enable us to meet every difficult dispensation with submission; and to look through the changes of the present life—to that unchangeable inheritance to which the Lord is leading us, when all evil shall cease, and where joy shall be perfect and eternal! I trust he who loves you strengthens you in this life of faith, and fills you with a peace that passes all understanding.

Perhaps you have heard that I have not been well. My illness was not so great as to confine me from my work, and the Lord was pleased to give me a peaceful frame of mind under his hand, so that I did not suffer much. For about a week I was set to learn the value of *hearing* by the lack of it; for I was so deaf that I could join in no conversation. But now, thanks to the great Physician, my symptoms are all removed.

A minister of Jesus Christ is as high a nobility (according to the spiritual heraldry in the Word of God) as any mortal man can attain. His department is much more important than that of a King or Emperor. I can wish Mr. ____ no higher preferment than to be an ambassador of the King of kings. It is, however, a very serious business; and he is young enough to admit of time for due

deliberation. Many in the time of their *first love*, while a sense of divine things and compassion of souls have been very warm upon their minds, have been *desirous* to preach the Gospel; but this *desire* alone does not amount to a divine call. In those whom the Lord has not designed for the service, it gradually weakens and dies away; or, if they too hastily push themselves forward into the work, they have often cause to repent it; for the ministry must be a wearisome and discouraging service—unless we are clear that God has called and appointed us to it. I hope it will appear that He who called Samuel of old, is calling him; then his desire will abide and increase; and, though some difficulties may occasionally intervene, you will upon the whole see the steps of Divine Providence favoring and leading forward—from the *blossom* to the *fruit*.

I am your much obliged and affectionate servant.

Letter 18

To Mr. W ____ .

August 13, 1773

My dear sir,

We are always glad to hear from you, because your paper is perfumed with the name of Jesus. You speak well of him, and you have good reason—for he has been a kind friend to you. I likewise am enabled to say something of him; and I trust the chief reason why I would wish my life to be prolonged is, that I may employ more of my breath in his praise. But, alas! while I endeavor to persuade others, that he is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely—I seem to be but half persuaded of it myself; I feel my heart so cold and unbelieving. But I hope I can say this is not **I**—but **sin** which dwells in me.

Did you ever see my picture? It has been drawn by a masterly hand. And though another person, and one whom I am far from resembling, sat for it, it is as like me as one new nickel is like another. The original was drawn at Corinth, and sent to some people of distinction at Rome. Many copies have been taken, and, though perhaps it is not to be seen in any of the London print-shops, it has a place in most public and private libraries, and I would hope in most families. I had seen it a great many times before I could discover one of my own features in it; but then my eyes were very bad. What is remarkable, it was drawn long before I was born—but, having been favored with some excellent eye-salve, I quickly knew it to be my own. I am drawn in an attitude which would be strange and peculiar, if it was not so common with me—looking two different and opposite ways at once, so that you would be puzzled to tell whether my eyes are fixed upon *heaven* or upon the *earth*; I am aiming at things inconsistent with each other at the same time, so that I can accomplish neither. According to the different light in which you view the picture, I appear to rejoice—and to mourn; to choose—and refuse; to be a conqueror—or a captive. In a word, I am a *double person*; I am a *riddle*—it is no wonder if you know not what to make of me, for I cannot tell what to make of myself. I would—and I would not; I do—and I do not; I can—and I cannot. I find the hardest things easy—and the easiest things impossible. But while I am in this perplexity, you will observe in the same piece a hand stretched forth for my relief, and may see a label proceeding out of my mouth with these words, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ, my Lord." The more I study this picture, the more I discover some new and striking resemblance, which convinces me that the painter knew me better than I knew myself! "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do—I do not do; but what I hate—I do. I have the desire to do what is good—but I cannot carry it out. For what I do—is not the good I

want to do. No, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing!"
Romans 7

You have desired a good work—may the Lord give you the desires of your heart. May He give you . . .
the *wisdom* of Daniel,
the *meekness* of Moses,
the *courage* of Joshua,
the *zeal* of Paul, and
that *self-abasement* and *humility* which Job and Isaiah felt—
when they not only had heard of Him by the hearing of the ear—
but saw His glory, and abhorred themselves in dust and ashes!

May you be taught of God—for none teaches like Him; and come forth an able minister of the New Testament, well instructed rightly to divide and faithfully to distribute the Word of truth.

In the school of Christ, you will have to learn some lessons which are not very pleasant to flesh and blood. You must learn to run, to fight, to wrestle, and many other exercises, some of which will try your strength, and others your patience.

You know the common expression, "a jack of all trades". I am sure a minister had need be such a one:

a brave soldier,
an alert watchman,
a caring shepherd,
a hardworking farmer,
a skillful builder,
a wise counselor,
a competent physician,
and a loving nurse.

But do not be discouraged—you have a wonderful and a gracious Master, who cannot only give instructions—but power and ability! He engages that His grace shall be sufficient, at all times and in all circumstances, for those who simply give themselves up to His teaching and his service.

I am sincerely yours.

Letter 19

To Mr. W ____ .

August 29, 1774

My dear sir,

I have been often with you in spirit in your new habitation. In my idea of it, it is a *grand* place; a *temple* where the Lord is worshiped; a *castle* guarded by Almighty Power. If I mistake not, it has several privileges beyond most of the houses in your neighborhood. Does not the sun often shine into it in the *night* season? Have you not some rooms so far exceeding the gallery of St. Paul's, that if you speak but in a whisper—your voice is heard beyond the clouds? Have you not a very fine prospect from it, when the air is clear? According to my notion of the situation, when you look one way—you have a long vista which would take one a good number of years to travel over, and a great number of curious *Ebenezers* erected (instead of mile-stones) all along the road. If you look the other way, there is always a kind of mist, which prevents objects which are near at hand from being clearly seen. But what is very extraordinary, I am told that you can see through that mist, to a land that lies a great way off, and that the more you look—the better you can see.

If every house around you had the like advantages, it would be certainly the finest village in the kingdom—a little heaven upon earth. All houses, from the king's to the laborer's, however they differ in other circumstances, agree in this—that they must have *windows* whereby they may receive the light. A palace without a window would be but little better than a dungeon; and a man would almost think himself buried alive in it. Many splendid houses are dungeons with respect to *spiritual light*. A believer could not bear the thoughts of living in any situation, unless he enjoyed the light of the Sun of Righteousness; and with this—any situation is tolerable.

You know the value of this light; and you are favored with it. Therefore I doubt not, that your house is a good one. May you enjoy it more and more, and now you are withdrawn from the noise of the town, and (as I suppose) in some measure from the hurry of business—may your leisure time be sanctified, and a sense of the Lord's presence brighten every hour of your future life; and may you dwell, as Jacob lodged for one night, at the gate of heaven, until the appointed moment when the gate shall open and let you in, to be forever with the Lord!

In the mean time, you are happy that the Lord has favored you with many opportunities and advantages of promoting his glory, and the good of his people, and given you a heart to improve them. I would tell you how it is with me if I could; at the best, it would be an inconsistent account. I am—what I would not like to be; and would like to be—what I cannot be. I rejoice—and mourn; I stand fast—and am thrown down in the same moment. I am both rich—and poor; I can do nothing—yet I can do all things. I live by miracle! I am opposed beyond my strength—yet I am not overpowered. I gain when I lose—and I often am a loser by my gains. In a word, I am a sinner, a vile one; but a sinner believing in the name of Jesus. I am a

silly sheep—but I have a gracious, watchful Shepherd; I am a dull scholar—but I have a Master who can make the dullest learn. He still bears with me, he still employs me, he still enables me, he still owns me.

Oh, for a coal of heavenly fire to warm my heart, that I might praise him as I ought! As a people, we have much cause of *humiliation* in ourselves, and much cause of *thankfulness* to him. In the main, I hope we are alive, though not as we could wish; our numbers rather increase from year to year, and some flourish. In the ordinances, we are favored in a measure with his presence. But, oh, for a day of his power; that his work may run broader and deeper, and the fire of grace spread from heart to heart, until the whole town be in a flame! To this I hope you will give a hearty Amen, and often remember us in your prayers.

I am, sincerely yours.

Letter 20

To Mr. W ____ .

May 25, 1775

My dear sir,

I was thinking of writing to you, before I received your letter, and I have been thinking of it often since. Yesterday I had the agreeable information, that your wife had safely delivered a daughter. This quickened my resolve, and determined me to congratulate your family upon the happy event, the very next post. I trust that you, and all nearly concerned in this mercy, rejoice in it, not only as an accession to your family—but especially as you see the good hand of a covenant God appearing for you and yours in answer to prayer. This

makes temporal mercies, mercies indeed, when we can receive them as the fruits and pledges of His special love; when they are sanctified by the promise and prayer, and when we call read in them the name and gift of Him who died for us. Please give my love to the family, and let them know that my heart is with them. May the Lord make them very happy in themselves, in each other, and in their family, and may they think they hear him saying upon this occasion, as Pharaoh's daughter did to the mother of Moses, "Take this child, and bring it up for me, and I will pay you your wages." The Lord's wages—is good pay indeed.

Who can express the honor and the comfort of bringing up a child for Jesus? The Lord has given you this honor; and I am sure you prefer it to all worldly considerations. May he give you the desire of your heart for each and every one of your children.

My wife and I are now in the line of *parents*. For though she never felt a mother's pains, and there doubtless are some feelings of a father to which I am a stranger; the Lord has given us a *child* whom we love as our own, and look upon as our own. We think it an advantage rather than otherwise that she was born (if I may so say) to us—above five years old, which saved us all the trouble and expense of an infant and toddler. It is a great mercy to us, that God has given her an amiable and manageable disposition, so that she is quite a companion; we love to please her, and she studies to please us; and she is, in general, *ruled with a word*. I trust she is sent hither to be numbered in due time among his favored people, and to know the Savior's grace in her youth. Help me, dear sir, with your prayers in her behalf.

You ask, if my soul be more alive to Jesus than ever? I can say he is precious to my soul, and that I love his ways and his service. He is

my hope, my end, my portion; and I esteem his favor better than life. But *lively feelings* are seldom my lot. Blessed be his name, he keeps and supports me. He also keeps the *flock* committed to my care, so that we are in the main preserved from offences and from strife. Now and then he brings a *stray lamb* into the fold, and often *he* is seen in the fold himself! Then the sheep are happy, for they know his voice, and admire his love. And we know he is present when we cannot see him—or else the wolf would quickly break in and scatter us! Here is our security—that his eye and his heart are upon us continually.

You ask about Mr. _____. He is well, and I hope goes on well. I do not think he is lukewarm; nor has his preaching been in vain. He is a young man, and must learn some things, as others have done before him—in the *school of experience*. But I trust he is sound and honest, and that none who were concerned in helping him through his difficulties, and bringing him into the ministry, will have reason to repent of it.

I am, sincerely yours.

Letter 21

To Mr. W ____ .

May 3, 1776

My dear sir,

Will you accept a short letter as an apology for a long silence. I have been working my way through a heap of unanswered letters; (I should have said *half* through;) had there been one from you in the number, it would have been dispatched among the first; but, as there was not, I have deferred a little and a little longer, until I am constrained to say, *Forgive me!* I hope and trust, that you find the

Lord's presence with you in your new home; otherwise you would think it a dungeon. There is the same difference among people now, as there was between the Egyptians and Israel of old. Multitudes are buried alive under a cloud of thick darkness—but all the Lord's people have light in their dwellings. Ah! how many great and fair houses are there, without the heavenly inhabitant! It might be written upon their doors, *God is not here*; and, when you go in, you may be sure of it, for there is neither *peace* nor *truth* within the walls.

This thought has often struck me, when I have been to see some fine houses, as they are called. When the Lord is not known and acknowledged, the *rooms* are but *prison cells*, in which the poor criminals have license to eat and sleep a little while, until the sentence under which they lie condemned, shall be executed upon them. On the other hand, the houses of believers, though most of them are poor cottages—are truly palaces; for it is the presence of the king that makes the court! There the Lord reigns upon a throne of grace, and there a royal guard of angels take their stand to watch over and minister to the heirs of salvation. After all, the best houses upon earth—are but *inns*, where we are accommodated a little time, while we are doing our Master's business.

Your real dwelling, your real home, is in heaven; here on earth, you are but a sojourner. But, to express it in a more honorable manner—you are an ambassador, entrusted with affairs of great importance, to manage for the King, your Master! Every believer, while upon earth, in His particular calling, is an ambassador for Christ, though not called to the ministry. He has something of his Master's *character* and *interest* to maintain. He derives his supplies, his supports, his instructions from above; and his great charge and care is—to be faithful to his commission; and every other care he may confidently

cast upon the Lord to whom he belongs. In this sense we are to remember our dignity, and not to stoop to a conformity to the poor world among whom we live; we are neither to imitate their customs, nor regard their maxims, nor speak their language, nor desire their honors or their favors, nor fear their frowns, for the Lord whom we serve has engaged to maintain and protect us, and has given us his instructions to which it is both our duty and our honor to conform. And, though the unbelieving world cannot be expected to think very favorably of us—yet they can do us no real harm—unless they prevail upon our unbelief, and make us shrink from his service. And, if through grace, we are preserved so as not to be ashamed of him now, hereafter he will not be ashamed of us.

If they account us as gazing-stocks and laughing-stocks because of our singularity; if they reproach, revile, and despise us—we may pity them; for a day is coming when they shall be ashamed, and when we shall stand forth with boldness, and shine like the sun in our Lord's kingdom. Then at least, if not before, the difference between those who fear the Lord, and those who fear him not, will be manifest. How different will be *their* language concerning him, Isaiah 25:9; Revelation 6:16-17. And how different will *his* language be to them, Matthew 25:34-41.

Oh, what manner of love, that we, who were like others by nature, should be thus distinguished by grace! We knew him not, and therefore we could not love him; we were alienated from him; sin, self, and Satan, ruled in our hearts; our eyes were blinded, and we were hastening along in the road that leads to death—without suspecting danger! But he would not let us perish. Though, when he knocked at the door of our hearts, we repeatedly refused him entrance; he would not take a denial—but exerted a gracious force; made us willing in the day of his power, and saved us in defiance of

ourselves. And from the happy hour when he enabled us to surrender ourselves to him—how tenderly has he pitied us, how seasonably has he relieved us, how powerfully upheld us! How many *Ebenezers* have we been called upon to rear to his praise! And he has said, that he will never leave us nor forsake us.

And, oh—what a prospect lies *before* us! When by his counsel he has guided us through life, he will receive us to his kingdom, give us a crown of glory, and place us near himself, to see him as he is, and to be satisfied with his love forever! How many years did we live—before we had the least idea of what we were destined to know and enjoy!

Many things look dark around us, and before us—but the spreading of the Gospel is, I trust, a token for good. Oh, that we might see the work running not only *broader* as to numbers—but *deeper* as to the life, power, and experience—in the hearts, tempers, and conversation of those who profess the truth. The Lord has removed many of his dear people from our church—to flourish in a better world. Not only many of the *old cedars*—but several of the choicest *young plants*—are taken away. Should I be sorry that the days of their *mourning* are ended, and that they are out of the reach of *snares* and *storms*? Nay, I should rather rejoice—and I do! Yet I feel bereaved. I miss them; they used to pray for me, comfort me, and often teach and shame me by their example. Pray that the Lord may raise us up more champions. I trust he has not wholly withdrawn from us. We walk in peace, and have some seasons of refreshment; now and then we hear of a new inquirer. I would be thankful when, as an angler, I catch a single fish. But oh, that the Lord would put his great net in my hand, and fill it to the brim!

I am, dearest sir, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Four Letters to a Young Lady

Letter 1

March 3, 1772

Dear Miss,

Your obliging request to hear from me has not been forgotten; and, if my leisure time were equal to my inclination, I would write very often.

And now, what shall I say? May the Lord direct me to send you a profitable word. It rejoices my heart to think, that at a time of life when you might have been plunging into the vanities of the world—you are seeking Jesus. The Lord, who appointed the hour of your birth, and the bounds of your habitation, was pleased in his good providence to withdraw you early from the *giddy circle of vanity* in which you might have lived, and to favor you with the advantages of godly example, instruction, and ordinances. You live at a distance from those ensnaring temptations by which the minds of young people are blinded and stupefied. Yet this alone would not have secured you. His providence has been subservient to his grace; otherwise, by this time, you would have been weary and impatient of restraint; you would have accounted the means of grace burdensome, and your home a prison! The evil of the heart is too deeply rooted to be overcome by anything less than the power of God. Whatever your papa and mamma, or the ministers of the gospel, could have told you concerning your state as a lost sinner, and your need of a Savior—you would *not* have believed them—unless the Lord himself had borne witness in your heart to his own truths.

You are now seeking him—yet, if he had not found you at first, you would never have sought him at all. This I mention for your encouragement, as a good reason why you may be assured that you shall not seek him in vain. I take it for granted, that, though you are but a young *soldier*, you have already met with *conflicts*. There is a *subtle enemy* who labors to distress, hinder, and wound all who desire to serve the Lord. If you could give up the way of holiness, and be content to make the world your portion—you would meet with no disturbance from him. If you were asleep—he would make no noise to awaken you. Those who are content with his service and wages—he manages with so much skill, that, though he leads them captives at his will, though he dwells and works in their hearts, though all the faculties of the mind and members of their body are under his influence—yet they are not aware of him at all! Yes, when many in this state pretend to dispute his very existence—he does not attempt to undeceive them!

Thus, while the strong one armed keeps his house—his goods are in peace. But, when the stronger than he, the gracious Redeemer, comes to deliver his prey out of the hand of the mighty, and to release a soul from Satan's captivity, then the enemy begins to show himself as he really is! And therefore I suppose by this time you can tell in a measure, from your own experience, why he is called in the Scripture— an accuser, an adversary, a serpent, a roaring lion; and what is meant by his wiles, devices, and fiery darts! He knows how to aggravate sin, to strengthen unbelief, to raise objections against the truth of the gospel, or to work upon the imagination, and to fill us with dark, uncomfortable, wild, or wicked thoughts.

But, if he assaults you in any of these ways, you need not fear him; for he is a *conquered* and a *chained* enemy! Jesus has conquered him, he has broken his power, and taken away his dominion, so far

as concerns those who flee for refuge to the hope of the gospel. And Jesus holds him with an breakable chain, and sets limits to his rage and malice, beyond which he cannot pass! Nor would he be permitted to open his mouth against the peace of his people—but that the Lord intends (for his greater confusion) to make him an *unwilling instrument* of promoting their good. By these exercises they learn to prize his free salvation, and to depend upon his grace alone; for they find they are not able to stand against their enemy by their own strength. Therefore, fear him not! He who delivered Daniel from the lions—will deliver you, and make you more than a conqueror by faith in his name, and at last bruise Satan under your feet. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." Ephesians 6:10-11

I wonder how my thoughts have turned upon this subject. I am sure I did not intend it when I sat down to write; and, if I had searched for one, I certainly would not have chosen this. If it should prove a word in season, I shall be glad. Perhaps it may; for, though I know not the present state of your mind, it is known to the Lord, and I began my letter with a desire that he would direct me what to send you. However, if it does not so directly suit you now, it may perhaps hereafter, and in the meantime you may lend it to your mamma. She knows what *temptations* mean.

Go on, my dear Miss, and may the Lord be with you. Give yourself to him every day, and many times a day; remember how many claims he has to you; especially remember this one, that he bought you with his own blood. He died—that you might live. May the name of Jesus be written upon the tablet of your heart, and be as a seal upon your arm; that all your desires and all your actions may be regulated by his Word, directed to his glory, and animated by a living principle of

grace, derived from him who is the fountain of grace. Two things alone are worth a serious thought—his presence and his image—the one to make you comfortable in yourself, the other that you may shine to his praise as a light in the world. These blessings, and the increase of them, are gifts which he bestows without money and without price. Yet it is our part to wait patiently upon him for them, by prayer, by reading his good Word, and frequenting his ordinances. Thus you shall know—if you follow on to know the Lord.

I am your affectionate friend.

Letter 2

November 13, 1772

My dear Miss W ____ .

So you received my last letter on your birthday! I hope, that, since your birthday, you have been enabled to wait steadfastly and patiently upon the Lord, and have seen much of his goodness. I am glad you complain of evil thoughts, fears and temptations; for, though these things are not joyous but grievous, they always accompany a work of grace—and, if you were wholly unacquainted with them, you would have reason to suspect you were not in the right way. The way to the kingdom is a *beaten* path; you are, I hope, following the *footsteps of the flock*. If you could ask any of the happy souls now in glory, how they came there—they would all tell you, that they were led there through *many tribulations*. For, though they did not all suffer greatly by persecution, poverty, and worldly troubles—yet they all had much to suffer from indwelling sin, unbelief, and Satan.

As to **evil thoughts**, they as unavoidably arise from an evil nature—as steam from a boiling tea-kettle. Every *cause* will have its *effect*, and a sinful *nature* will have sinful *effects*. You can no more keep such thoughts out of your mind—than you can stop the course of the clouds. But, if the Lord had not taught you—you would not have been sensible of them, nor concerned about them. This is a token for good. By nature your thoughts would have been only evil, and that continually. But you find something within you that makes you dislike these thoughts; makes you ashamed of them, makes you strive and pray against them. These evil thoughts convince you, that, though you do not willfully *speak* or *do* evil—yet upon the account of your evil *thoughts* alone—you are a sinner, and stand in need of such great forgiveness; that if there were not a precious, compassionate, and mighty Savior, you could have no hope.

Now, this *something* that *reveals* and *resists* your evil thoughts—what can it be? It cannot be human nature; for we naturally have vain imaginations. It is the grace of God! The Lord has made you sensible of your disease—that you might love and prize the great Physician. The knowledge of his love shall make you hate these thoughts; and faith in his blood shall deliver you from the guilt of them; yet you will be pestered with them more or less while you live in this world, for sin is wrought into our bodies, and our souls must be freed from our bodies—before we shall be fully freed from the evils under which we mourn!

Your other complaint of **temptations** is likewise a good one. If you were to visit some young ladies who know no other end of living—but to dress and dance and socialize; and if you were to ask them if they are troubled with Satan's temptations—they would think that you were out of your wits! Poor things! They know no better! They are blinded by the god of this world; they go on quietly in the way of sin

and vanity, *careless* of their souls, and *mindless* of eternity! While they continue in this course, you may be sure Satan will not disturb them! They are *asleep*, and it would not be for his interest to do anything that might awaken them out of their *pleasant dream*!

And if you yourself were thus asleep, Satan would be content that you should sleep on—and take your rest. But, when he sees anyone awakened out of this deadly sleep, he probably tries first to lull them asleep again; and, if the Lord prevents that by his mercy, then Satan alters his measures, and *roars like a lion* which has lost his prey. Be thankful, my dear, that he treats you as his *enemy*; for miserable is the state of those to whom he behaves as a *friend*. And always remember that he is a chained enemy! He may terrify—but he cannot devour those who have fled for refuge to Jesus. And the Lord shall over-rule all for good. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil!" Ephesians 6:10-11

The fear you express on account of the *falls of some professors* whom you thought better than yourself, will, I hope, be a means, by the Lord's blessing—of keeping you from falling as they have done. It is said, *Do not be high-minded—but fear*; and again, *Blessed is the man that fears always*. If you were coming to to visit me, (I would be glad if you were,) and you heard before you set out, that many had been robbed, and that the robbers were still upon the road, I would not blame you for being afraid. But, if that fear led you to procure a guard sufficient to protect you, then you might travel with safety, notwithstanding that others had been robbed. So, if the falls of professors, and a sense of your own danger, make you cry earnestly that God would keep you; he will hear and answer your prayer, and you shall stand safe supported by his power, though many fall

around you. *They fell because they did not look to him.* You cannot be too jealous of your own heart, or too cautious of the snares you are exposed to—but you have no cause to distrust the Lord; he is able and faithful to keep those from falling, who, sensible of their own weakness, cry daily to him, "Hold me up—and I shall be safe!" Continue in prayer, that you may be preserved humble and abased in your own eyes, and then I am sure you will not fall.

I am sincerely, your affectionate friend and servant.

Letter 3

March 23, 1773

My dear Miss,

In your last letter, you intimated some expectation of receiving a letter from me on or about your birthday, "So she shall," thought I, "if we live so long;" and accordingly I made a memorandum in my head, to write to Miss W ____ the twenty-third of March, that she may have it on the twenty-fourth, which is her birthday. Just now I sat down to comply with this order; but how did I stare, when, taking up your letter, I found your birth-day was not the twenty-fourth—but the fourth. So all my punctuality is thrown away, and all the pretty things I might have tried to say upon the subject of a birthday are almost three weeks out of season. Well, I must make the best of it, and congratulate you, not that you are exactly so many years old, (I know not how many,) but so many years and twenty days.

If I thought you did not seek, and in a measure know, the Lord's salvation, I would not congratulate you at all. I have often been struck with the absurdity of worldly people making their birthday a season of joy, unless in the year when they come to age, and are

released from the restraints of parents, tutors, and guardians, and at liberty to act just as self dictates. In other respects, should they rejoice every year on a certain day, that they have a year less to live where their hearts and their treasures are fixed, and are a year nearer to their eternity which they cannot bear to think of. Ah, how many are jovial on their birthday, who will at length see cause to wish they had never been born! But you have reason to bless God for your birth, since he has been pleased to make you a partaker of a new and heavenly birth, and to admit you into the number of his children. He sent you into the world at such a time, and under such circumstances, as that, in his appointed hour, you might hear and receive the gospel of his grace.

Were it possible you could be informed of the history of all who were born into the world, the same year or the same day with yourself, I mean especially of your own gender, it would give you an affecting view of the mercies by which the Lord has distinguished you from thousands. Many of them are already in eternity, and perhaps the greater part of these taken away before they knew why they came into the world. Could you visit those of them who are still living, you would find some crippled, deformed, blind, or deaf; some defective in their faculties, some languishing under incurable diseases, some struggling under poverty, destitute of friends or food; some, having been accustomed to evil examples from their infancy, and not being favored with the means of instruction, are, though young in years, already grown old in sin. Perhaps you would hardly find one in the whole number so remarkably favored in all respects as yourself. When you had finished your survey, would not your heart adopt and feel the sentiment in the hymn?—

Are these your favors, day by day,
To me above the rest?

Then let me love you more than they,
And try to serve you best.

But the chief mercy of all is, that the Lord has drawn you to seek his face, and to place your happiness in his favor; without this, the possession of all that the earth can afford would be of little worth. May he encourage and animate you to press forward to the prize of your high calling. May his good Spirit teach, warn, and comfort you, and keep you ever mindful that there is no safety but in a continual dependence upon him. Satan is a watchful enemy; he studies our situation and disposition, that he may spread snares for us to the greatest advantage, and is not only to be dreaded when he fights directly against our faith and peace as a roaring lion—but is often as near and as dangerous when we are ready to think him at a distance. He sometimes lays his schemes with little noise, and prevails before he is perceived. But those who humbly look unto the Lord to keep them, shall be preserved.

I hope you will be constant in all the means of grace, especially in secret prayer, and a close attention to the Word of God; if these are neglected, or a formal spirit indulged in them, public ordinances may be frequented, and yet the soul grow lean and dry, and get little benefit from them. But, if we are aware of our weakness and danger, and look continually to the Lord to hold us up that we may be safe—he will keep our feet out of the net.

There are too many professors who live below their privileges; they have everything of religion but its power and its comforts. But it is your happiness to be acquainted with a favored few, who apply themselves in good earnest, and follow the Lord with their whole heart, like Caleb of old. I trust the Lord will give you to be like-minded; to walk as a stranger and pilgrim here on earth, and to have

your heart and affections in heaven, where Jesus is; then you may well rejoice in every returning birthday, and say, *Now is full salvation nearer than when I first believed.*

Believe me to be your affectionate friend.

Letter 4

November 9, 1773

My dear Miss,

I am at a loss how to write, not having a letter to answer. It is true, your mamma gave me some hint of a subject—but I have nothing very interesting to offer upon that head at present. My best wishes and prayers attend you, that the Lord may guide, shine upon, and bless you in every relation and circumstance of life that may be before you.

I have reason to speak well of the *marriage* state; and it always gives me pleasure when, in the way of my office, I am called to tie the marriage knot, when I have reason to believe the prospect is warranted by prudence, the parties united by affection, and that they come together in the fear and in the name of the Lord. I think I may take it for granted, from your mamma's letter, that these requisites concur in your concern, and therefore I heartily bid you godspeed. And I congratulate your lover, whoever he be, believing that, if the Lord bestows you upon him, and gives him a heart to value you aright—that you will prove a treasure and a blessing to him.

However, let me remind you upon this occasion, that *vanity is deeply engraved upon all below the skies*, and that the more happy we are in *creature comforts*, so much the more are we exposed to

*snare*s and *crosses*. Oh, how happy is it to know the Lord, the *Fountain* of living waters! for every other acquisition without him will prove a broken cistern. But, as he has taught your heart to choose and rest in himself supremely as your portion, you have a warrant from his gracious promises to hope, that he will bless you in all your connections and concerns.

In the mean time, I trust you are praying to the Lord to guard and strengthen you against the new *stratagems* and *devices* which Satan, so far as he is permitted, will plot against your peace and steadfastness, when you shall enter upon a new and untried situation. Pray that you may be deeply impressed with the uncertainty of this state of things, and the emptiness of all creature good—in comparison to the light of God's countenance, which is better than life. How different, for the most part, is the appearance between a wedding-day and a dying-day; yet, however long the interval may be between them, the latter must come, and then the space, which in prospect might seem *long*, will affect us no more than the remembrance of a *morning dream*. Could I have been told when I married, that my wife and I should live together more than twenty-three years; that our affection should increase as we went on; that the Lord would favor us with a path remarkably smooth, and exempt us from nine trials out of ten which are ordinarily found in wedded life; how would my poor vain heart have been elated! Well, all this, and more has happened. For almost twenty-four years past, I have never seen a single day or hour in which I wished to change my situation with any person upon earth; and we are still spared to each other. But now, shall I tell you what I see when I take a review of past times? Forgetful as I am, I can recollect innumerable instances of the Lord's mercy. We set out in life like two strangers who had a wilderness before them, and knew not a single step of the way; but, oh, how wonderfully has He led us! I can recount likewise

innumerable evils, snares, sins, trials, and inquietudes, which, if put together, would make a large abatement of what, if viewed in the lump, might seem a uniform course of happiness and satisfaction. And, as to all the rest, it is gone beyond recall; the shadows of the evening are beginning to advance over us, and how miserable would we now be, if our hope was only in this life! May the Lord write upon your heart, while you are young—a conviction, that communion with him, and grace to glorify him and serve him in the world—are the only things which make life, in its best estate, valuable or desirable.

Pray for me, and believe me to be, sincerely yours.

Letters of John Newton to William Bull, written from 1773 to 1805.

Mr. Bull became pastor of the Independent church at Newport Pagnell about the same time that Mr. Newton came to Olney. (The two places were but five miles apart.) The acquaintance between these friends did not commence until some time after this. No sooner, however, did they come really to know each other than this acquaintance speedily ripened into a very *intimate*, and, as it proved, a *life-long* friendship. In his Diary, at this time, Mr. Newton speaks again and again of the high esteem in which his friend was held. Thus he says: "I find few with whom I can converse with equal advantage, whose manner of thinking is so deep and solid." Again: "He has just called and spent an hour with me. I could sit silent half a day to listen to him, and am almost unwilling to speak a word for fear of preventing him." Once more: "I admire Mr. Bull; so humble, so spiritual, so judicious and so savory . . . I think he will be my most profitable companion in these parts."

The fellowship between Mr. Newton and Mr. Bull, as may be well supposed, was very frequent, so long as the former resided at *Olney*; and when he removed to *London*, there was abundant opportunity for its renewal, as Mr. Bull was in the habit, for many years, of preaching for several sabbaths at the Tabernacle and at Tottenham Court and Surrey Chapels. The flame of their affection burnt brightly to the last; for, as Mr. Newton writes in 1800, when to write had become a task, "If two needles are properly touched by a magnet, they will retain their sympathy for a long time. But if two hearts are truly united to the Heavenly Magnet, their mutual attraction will be permanent in time and to eternity. Blessed be the Lord for a good

hope, that it is thus between you and me. I could not love you better if I saw or heard from you every day."

Mr. Bull was pastor of the church at Newport for fifty years; a church which he was enabled, by the blessing of God, to raise from a very low condition to a state of great prosperity. For a considerable portion of this time he also presided over a theological institution, in the formation of which Mr. Newton took a very active part, and the special design of which was to train suitable young men of evangelical sentiments for the *Christian ministry*, without regard to denominational distinctions.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Psalm 133:1

Dear Sir,

At present it is *January* with me — both within and without. The outward sun shines and looks pleasant — but his beams are faint, and too feeble to dissolve the frost.

So is it in my heart! I have many bright and pleasant beams of truth in my view — but cold predominates in my frost-bound spirit, and they have but little power to warm me!

I could tell a stranger something about Jesus, which would perhaps astonish him. Such a glorious person, such wonderful love, such humiliation, such a death! And then, what He is now in Himself, and what He is to His people. What a Sun! what a Shield! what a Life! what a Friend!

My tongue can run on upon these subjects sometimes, and could my heart keep pace with it — I would be the happiest fellow in the country!

Stupid creature! to know these things so well, and yet be no more affected with them!

Indeed, I have reason to be upon ill terms with myself. It is strange that pride should ever find anything in my experience to feed upon; but this completes my character for folly, vileness, and inconsistency — that I am not only poor — but proud! And though I am convinced I am a very wretch, as nothing before the Lord — I am prone to go forth among my fellow-creatures as though I were wise and holy!

You wonder *what I am doing* — and well you may. I am sure you would, if you *lived* with me. Too much of my time passes in *busy idleness*, too much in *waking dreams*. I *aim* at something — but hindrances from within and without make it difficult for me to accomplish anything. I have written three or four pages since you was here, in the little book I showed you. It is to be but about the size of a shilling pamphlet; and if I go on as I have begun, it may be finished before Christmas! I dare not say I am *absolutely idle*, or that I *willfully* waste much of my time. I think I could complete my book in five or six days, if I had nothing else to do; but I have seldom one hour free from interruption. *Letters* come that must be answered—*visitants* that must be received—*business* that must be attended to. I have a good many *sheep* and *lambs* to look after — sick and afflicted souls dear to the Lord; and therefore whatever stands still — these must not be neglected. Among these various avocations, night comes before I am ready for noon, and the week closes when, according to the state of my business, it should not be more than Tuesday! Oh precious irrecoverable time! Oh that I had more wisdom in

redeeming and improving you! Pray for me, that the Lord may teach me to serve him better.

Mrs. Newton has been one week confined to her chamber through illness — but is pretty well again. We abound in mercies and causes for gratitude; but what a shame and pity to make such *poor returns* to the Author of them! I long to come to Newport to see you — but I believe I must wait for that pleasure until the days are a little longer. In the meantime you will be as welcome to us here, if you will trot over — as a new guinea to a miser's pocket.

I am very affectionately yours,

John Newton

January 27, 1778

Naughty Sir,

To keep me at home four afternoons upon the tip-toe of expectation — and not come near me at last. If you cannot send me a certificate, signed by the doctor and church-warden, specifying that you were too ill to travel, I have reason to be angry with you! But to show my forgiving spirit, if you will come over on Monday To dinner, I will give you something to eat, and your certificate of pardon.

I am to preach (if I can) three times on Fast-day — but have at present fixed only upon one text, which, for a certain reason, I shall not mention to you at present. I send you, however, according to order, a text and a plan which I found among my old papers. I preached it about sixteen years ago to a congregation of about twelve, in my own house, sometime before I was brought into the public ministry. I have not time to read it over; but if it may put any hints in

your way, it is at your service. I cannot send you my present thoughts upon another text, for a plain reason, namely, that I am not able yet to think for myself; and I must *receive* — before I can *communicate*. It would be mocking you to offer you *drink* — out of an empty vessel.

Since I have begun to write, I have thought perhaps one of my texts will be either Psalm 97:1, or Psalm 19:1. The whole system of *my politics* is summed up in that one sentence, "The Lord reigns!" I wish you would send me, by the bearer, some hints towards a sermon on it. It would be a good text if I knew how to manage it.

The times look awfully dark indeed; and as the clouds grow thicker, the stupidity of the nation seems proportionally to increase. If the Lord had not a remnant here, I would have very formidable apprehensions. But he loves his children; some are sighing and mourning before him, and I am sure he hears their sighs, and sees their tears. I trust there is mercy in store for us at the bottom; but I expect a *shaking time* before things get into a right channel, before we are humbled, and are taught to give him the glory.

The state of the *nation*, the state of the *churches* — both are deplorable. Those who should be *praying* — are *disputing* and *fighting* among themselves! Alas! how many professors are more concerned for the mistakes of government, or of the Americans, than for their own sins! When will these things end?

Love me, and pray for me, and come to see me — for I cannot come to you. With my love and Mrs. Newton's to you and Mrs. Bull,

I remain, your obliged friend,

John Newton Olney, 24 Feb., 1778.

Dear Sir,

I am so monstrous busy, I have hardly time to tell you how sorry I am for my disappointment, and your illness, which was the cause of it. Indeed, I am as sorry for both, as a Calvinist ought to be. It was the time *you* and *I* appointed for meeting; had it been the *Lord's* time — nothing could have prevented you. I wish he may give you permission to come next Monday, or any day after tomorrow which you please, only send word. What do you think of it? I have a double motive for wishing to see you now, because, besides having your company, it would be a proof that you were better.

Last Sunday afternoon we had a great personage with us at church. I endeavored to persuade all the congregation to kiss Him. But though I talked a whole hour about it, few would comply. Alas! it was because they did not know him; and though I told them who he was, they would not believe me.

Dear Sir,

When I found the morning coaches came in without you, I was not much disappointed. I know how difficult it is to get away from Northampton if you are seen in the street after breakfast. The horseleech has three daughters, saying, *Give, give!* The cry there is, *Preach, preach.* When you have told them all, you must tell them more, or tell it them over again. Whoever will find *tongue* — they will engage to find *ears*. Yet I do not blame this importunity. I wish you were teased more with it in your own town; for though undoubtedly there are too many both at Northampton and here whose religion lies

too much in *hearing* — yet, in many, it proceeds from a love to the truth, and to the ministers who dispense it. And I generally observe that those who are not willing to hear a stranger (if his character is known) are indifferent enough about hearing their own minister.

I beg you to pray for me. I am a poor creature, full of needs. I seem to need the *wisdom* of Solomon, the *meekness* of Moses, and the *zeal* of Paul — to enable me to make full proof of my ministry. But, alas! you may guess the rest.

Send me "The Way to Christ"! I am willing to be a debtor to the wise and unwise, to doctors and shoe-makers, if I can get a hint, or a *Nota Bene* from anyone, without respect to parties.

When a house is on fire, Churchmen and Dissenters, Methodists, Papists, Moravians, and Mystics — are all welcome to bring water. At such times nobody asks, "Dear friend, what church do you worship at?" Or "What do you think of the five points?"

Love and thanks to Mrs. Bull, etc,

John Newton

28th April, 1778.

Dear friend,

My dear wife has been quite ill. Her head was ill when at your house — but she can carry it off pretty well, if not quite bad, for her spirits are naturally very good, which is a great mercy. *Sickness is a bitter pill to the flesh* — but good natural spirits *sweeten* the pill, if I may so say, and make it rather more palatable.

The Lord is good; he knows *what* we need, and *when* we need it; and then have it we must and shall — whether it be sweet, bitter, or sour, for he will withhold no *good* thing from those who fear and love him. He weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance; with equal accuracy he adjusts all that concerns us. Worms as we are, he is attentive to everything that relates to our peace and welfare, as though we, each of us singly, were the sole objects of his providential care. At the same time, he is providing for the lions and ravens, supporting all the ants and worms that creep upon the earth; at the same time he upholds and enlightens the inhabitants of the heavenly world. His eye and his heart are attentively fixed upon you and worthless me. Well may we say, "Who is a God like unto you!"

Affectionately yours,

John Newton Olney 1st July, 1778.

July 7, 1778

My dear friend,

I don't know that I have anything to say worth the postage, though perhaps, had I seen you before you set off, something might have occurred which will not be found in my letter. Yet I write a line, because you bid me, and are now in a far foreign country. You will find Mr. **** a man to your tooth—but he is in Mr. W****'s connection. So I remember Mr. Bede, after giving a high character of some contemporary, kicks his full pail of milk down, and reduces him almost to nothing, by adding in the close to this purpose; "But, unhappy man—he did not keep Easter our way!" I don't care a fig for all such religious connections! Therefore I venture to repeat it, that Mr. ****, though he often sees and hears Mr. W****, and I believe

loves him well, is a good man—and you will see the invisible mark upon his forehead, if you examine him with your spiritual spectacles.

I do pity you in London! I see you melted with heat, stifled with smoke, stunned with noise! Ah! what a change from the brooks, and bushes, and birds, and green fields—to which you lately had access. Of old they used to retire into the deserts for contemplation and meditation. If I was to set myself a moderate penance—it might be to spend two weeks in London in the height of summer! But I forget myself. I hope the Lord is with you—and then all places are alike. He makes the dungeon and the stocks comfortable, Acts 26. Yes, even a fiery furnace, and a lion's den! A child of God in London—seems to be in all these trying situations—but Jesus can preserve His own people. I honor the grace of God in those few (comparatively few, I fear,) who preserve their garments undefiled in that Sardis! The air is filled with infection; and it is by God's special power and miraculous preservation, that they enjoy spiritual health—when so many sicken and fall around them on the right hand and on the left. May the Lord preserve you from the various epidemic soul diseases which abound where you are—and may He be your comfort and defense from day to day.

Last week we had a lion in town. I went to see him. He was wonderfully tame; as friendly with his keeper, as docile and obedient as a pet dog. Yet the man told me he had his surly fits, when they dared not touch him. No looking-glass could express my face more justly—than this lion did my heart. I could trace every feature—as wild and fierce by nature; yes, much more so—but grace has in some measure tamed me. I know and love my Keeper, and sometimes watch his looks that I may learn his will. But, oh! I have my surly fits too! Seasons when I relapse into the savage again, as though I had forgotten all.

July 13, 1778

My dear friend,

As we are so soon to meet, as I have nothing very important to communicate, and many things occur which might demand my time; I have no other plea to offer, either to you or myself, for writing again—but because I love you.

I pity the minister with whom you talked this morning. But we must take men and things as we find them—and when we fall in company with those from whom we can get little other good, it is likely we shall at least find occasion for the exercise of patience and charity towards them, and of thankfulness to him who has made us to differ. And these are good things, though perhaps the occasion may not be pleasant. Indeed, a Christian, if in a right spirit, is always in his Lord's school, and may either learn a new lesson, or how to practice an old one—by everything he sees or hears, provided he does not willfully tread upon forbidden ground. If he were constrained to spend a day with the poor creatures in Newgate prison, though he could not talk with them of what God has done for his soul, he might be more sensible of God's mercy, by the contrast he would observe around him. He might rejoice for himself—and mourn over them—and thus perhaps get as much benefit as from the best sermon he ever heard!

It is necessary, all things taken together, to have interaction more or less, with *narrow-minded people*. If they are, notwithstanding their prejudices, civil to us—they have a right to some civility from us. We may love them, though we cannot admire them; and pick something good from them, notwithstanding we see so much to blame. It is

perhaps the highest triumph we can obtain over bigotry—when we are able to bear with bigots themselves. For they are a set of troublesome folks, whom Mr. Self is often very forward to exclude from the comprehensive love and tenderness which he professes to exercise towards those who differ from him.

I am glad your present home (a believer should be always at home) is pleasant; the rooms large and airy; your host and hostess kind and spiritual; and, upon the whole, all things as well as you could expect to find them, considering where you are. I do not wish you to live there, for my own sake as well as yours—but if the Lord should so appoint it—I believe he can make you easy there, and enable me to make a tolerable shift without you. Yet I certainly shall miss you; for I have no person in this neighborhood with whom my heart so thoroughly unites in spiritual things, though there are many whom I love.

Conversation with most Christians is something like going to court; where, except you are dressed exactly according to a prescribed standard, you will either not be admitted, or must expect to be gaudily stared at. But you and I can meet and converse without pretense, without fear of offending, or being accounted offenders, for a word out of place, and not exactly in the right mode.

I think my sentiments and experience are as orthodox and Calvinistic as need be; and yet I am a sort of speckled bird among my Calvinist brethren. I am a mighty good Churchman—but pass among them as a secret Dissenter. On the other hand, the Dissenters (many of them I mean) think me defective, either in understanding or in conscience, for staying where in the church. Well! there is a middle party, called Methodists—but neither do my dimensions exactly fit with them. I am somehow disqualified for claiming a full brotherhood with any

party. But there are a few among all parties who bear with me and love me—and with this I must be content at present. But so far as they love the Lord Jesus, I desire, and by his grace I determine (with or without their permission) to love them all. Church denomination walls, though stronger than the walls of Babylon, must come down in the general ruin, when the earth and all its works shall be burnt up, if no sooner!

My dear friend,

I thought that it pleased your very heart to see so much *simplicity* and *spirituality* in a lady of fortune. It is not *wealth* — but the *love* of it, and the *pride* of it, which are hurtful to professors. I know several people of distinction, who are as eminent for humility and devotedness to God — as for their rank in life. And, through mercy, I have no intimacy with any in a line of life above me, but what I think are such. It is the triumph of grace — to make the *rich humble*, and the *poor thankful*.

Oh, the gospel is an admirable expedient, a cure-all, equally suited to every condition of life, a universal cordial, a sovereign antidote! Those who truly receive it, are qualified to live in every situation to which the Lord in his providence appoints them. Though the air is infected, and thousands fall around them — they shall flourish, for the grace of their Lord is always sufficient for them, and the truths upon which they feed keep them from being either *elated by prosperity*, or *depressed unduly by trials*. Everywhere, and in all things, they are instructed. They hear the voice of their Beloved, are guided by his eye, animated by his example, and cheered by his presence!

I love you a little better than I did, because you know and love Dr. Conyers. I am not fond of making comparisons between ministers, and yet am almost constrained to set him at the head, as the first of "the first three" of our line. But I should not do so, upon the account of his gifts as a minister, if I did not know he is little in his own eyes. I estimate a *minister's character* from combining what he is in the pulpit — with what he is when out of it; and they stand highest upon my scale, whose conduct is most expressive of the doctrines they preach.

If we cannot attain to "the first three," or to be ranked among "the thirty," still it is a mercy to be on the Lord's side, and to be honored with an employment in his family, though in a lower place, so we may but be enabled to say, "I do a little for him, and to feed a few of the weakest and poorest of his children, for his sake."

Especially ought *I* to think so, who was before a blasphemer and a reviler! That I, who once deliberately renounced him, despised his blood, and crucified him afresh, that I should be redeemed and saved from the wilds of Africa, and put in trust with the blessed gospel — this was mercy indeed. I am ready to say —

"The first archangel never saw
So much of grace before."

And yet I am not *duly affected* with it. Oh stupid, cold creature, to be no more humbled, no more thankful!

I am sincerely yours,

John Newton Olney, 18th July, 1778.

July, 1778

My dear friend,

I was glad to hear that you were again within a few miles of me; and I praise the Lord, who led you out and brought you home in safety, and preserved all in peace while you were abroad, so that you found nothing very painful to embitter your return. Many go abroad in health—but return no more. The affectionate wife, the prattling children, listen for the well-known sound of papa's foot at the door—but they listen in vain! A fall or a fever has intercepted him, and he is gone—far, far away. Some leave all well when they go from home—but how changed, how trying, the scene when they come back! In their absence, the Lord has taken away the desire of their eyes with a stroke! Or perhaps ruffians have plundered and murdered their family in the dead of the night—or a fire has devoured their habitation!

Ah! how large and various is the list of evils and calamities with which sin has filled the world! You and I have escape them. We stand, though in a field of battle, where thousands fall around us—only because the Lord is pleased to keep us. May He have the praise—and may we only live to love and serve him.

My wife has been very ill, and my heart often much pained while you have been absent. But the Lord has removed his hand—she is much better, and I hope she will be seen in his house tomorrow. I have few trials in my own person—but when the Lord afflicts her, I feel it. It is a mercy that he has made us one—but it exposes us to many a pain, which we might have missed if we cared but little for each other. Alas! there is usually an ounce of the golden calf, of idolatry and dependence, in all the warm regard we bear to creatures! For this

reason, our sharpest trials usually spring from our most valued comforts.

I cannot come to you; therefore you must come hither speedily. Be sure to bring Mr. B**** with you. I shall be very glad to see him, and I long to thank him for binding my book. It looks well on the outside, and I hope to find it sound and savory. I love the author, and that is a step towards liking the book. For where we love—we are generally tender, and favorably take everything by the best handle, and are vastly full of candor. But if we are prejudiced against the author, the poor book is half condemned before we open it. It had need be written well; for it will be read with a suspicious eye, as if we wished to find treason in every page.

I am glad I profited you by calling myself a *speckled bird*. I can tell you, such a bird in this day, that wears the full color of no sect or party, is a rare breed; if not quite so scarce as the phoenix—yet to be met with but here and there. It is impossible I should be all of one color, when I have been a debtor to all sorts; and, like the jay in the fable, have been indebted to most of the birds in the air for a feather or two. Church and Dissenter, Methodist and Moravian, may all perceive something in my coat taken from them. None of them are angry with me for borrowing from them—but then, why could I not be content with their color, without going among other flocks and coveys, to make myself such a motley figure? Let them be angry; if I have culled the best feathers from all, then surely I am finer than any!

I am sincerely yours,

John Newton

Dear Mr. Bull,

When you are with the King, and are getting good for yourself, speak a word for me and mine. I have reason to think you see him oftener, and have nearer access to him than myself. Indeed, I am unworthy to look at him, or to speak to him at all — much more that he should speak tenderly to me; yet I am not wholly without his notice: he supplies all my needs, and I live under his protection. My enemies see his Royal arms over my door, and dare not enter. Were I detached from him for a moment, in that moment they would make an end of me.

I am, as I ought to be, your affectionate and obliged,

John Newton

My birthday, 4th August, 1778.

August, 1778

Dear friend,

If the Lord affords health; if the weather be tolerable; if no unforeseen change takes place; if no company comes in upon me tonight, (which sometimes unexpectedly happens,) with these provisos, Mr. S **** and I have engaged to travel to **** on next Monday, and hope to be with you by or before eleven o'clock!

In such a precarious world, it is needful to form our plans at two days' distance, with precaution and exceptions, James 4:13. However, if it be the Lord's will to bring us together, and if the purposed interview is for his glory and our good, then I am sure

nothing shall prevent it. And who in his right wits would wish either to visit or be visited upon any other terms? O! if we could but be pleased with his will, we might be pleased from morning to night, and every day in the year.

Pray for a blessing upon our coming together. It would be a pity to walk ten miles to pick straws, or to come with our empty vessels upon our heads, saying, "We have found no water!"

My dear friend,

I was unwilling not to leave a line to tell you that we sympathize with you and Mrs. Bull in your severe trial. (The death of an infant.) But, at the same time, I rejoice exceedingly in the Lord's goodness, enabling you to be resigned and satisfied with his will, despite all the feelings and pinchings of flesh and blood. Had the child lived, the warmest desires of a parent's heart for him could only have been, that he might at last have arrived to that rest and happiness, to which the Lord has now brought him by a shorter cut. Saving thereby him from many troubles, and you from some occasional heartaches, which must otherwise have been experienced. If you can now believe and say, "He does all things well" — with what transport would you say it, if the *whole plan* of his wisdom and love was unfolded to your view? He will condescend to unfold it to you hereafter, and it will fill you with admiration. Your *tender plant* is now housed, out of the reach of *storms*. It is an affliction, to be cordially rejoiced in, when the Lord, who cares for us, intimates his will by the event.

What a blessing to be a Christian — to have a *hiding* place and a *resting* place always at hand! To be assured that all things work for our good, and that our compassionate Shepherd has his eye always

upon us, to support and to relieve us. The flesh will feel the sharp affliction — but faith and prayer will lighten the burden, and heal the wound. Daily your sense of the Lord's goodness will increase, and the sense of pain will abate, so that you will have less sorrow, and more joy, from day to day.

The Lord favored us with a tolerable day yesterday, and I hope he was in the midst of us — yet, upon the whole, we have but slack times. Oh for a revival, a day of Pentecost, a visible accomplishment of that gracious promise, Ezekiel 34:6! I trust my soul desires it; but, alas! my desires are faint and cold. My subjects yesterday were, forenoon, Psalm 142:1,2; afternoon, 1 Corinthians 10:12, a watch word. In the evening, a hymn about the *sheep* and the Shepherd, how he dwells among them, and they lie around in safety at his feet. They are surrounded by wolves, visible and invisible — these growl and thirst for blood; but the Shepherd's eye controls them. He stands and feeds his sheep in the midst of their enemies, who grudge and snarl — but cannot prevail against the sheep, helpless as they are, because the Lord is their Shepherd.

Pray for your poor friend and brother,

John Newton

Olney, 7th Sept., 1778, Monday.

October 27, 1778

My dear friend,

I have been witness to a great and important revolution this morning, which took place while the greatest part of the world was

asleep. Like many state-revolutions, its first beginnings were almost indiscernible—but the progress, though gradual, was steady—and the event decisive. A while ago darkness reigned. Had a man from space then dropped, for the first time, into our world—he might have thought himself banished into a hopeless dungeon. How could he expect light to rise out of such a dark state? And when he saw the first glimmering of dawn in the east, how could he promise himself that it was the forerunner of such a glorious sun as has since arisen! With what wonder would such a new-comer observe the bounds of his view enlarging, and the distinctness of objects increasing from one minute to another; and how well content would he be to part with the twinkling of the stars, when he had the broad day all around him in exchange! I cannot say this revolution is extraordinary, because it happens every morning—but surely it is astonishing, or rather it would be so—if man was not astonishingly stupid!

We were once such strangers! Darkness, gross darkness, covered us. How confined were our views! And even the things which were within our reach—we could not distinguish. Little did we then think what a glorious day we were appointed to see; what an unbounded prospect would before long open before us! We knew not that there was a Sun of Righteousness, and that he would dawn, and rise, and shine upon our hearts. And as the idea of what we see now—was then hidden from us, so at present we are almost equally at a loss how to form any conception of the stronger light and brighter prospects which we wait and hope for. Comparatively we are still in the dark—at the most, we have but a dim twilight, and see nothing clearly—but it is the dawn of immortality, and a sure presage and earnest of glory.

Thus, at times, it seems a darkness that may be felt broods over your natural spirits—but when the day-star rises upon your heart, you see and rejoice in his light. You have days as well as nights; and after a

few more vicissitudes, you will take your flight to the regions of everlasting light, where your sun will go down no more. Happy you, and happy I—if I shall meet you there, as I trust I shall. How shall we love, and sing, and wonder, and praise the Savior's name!

Last Sunday a young man died here of extreme old age, at twenty-five. He labored hard to ruin a good constitution, and unhappily succeeded—yet amused himself with the hopes of recovery almost to the last. We have a sad multitude of such poor creatures in this place, who labor to stifle each other's convictions, and to ruin themselves and associates, soul and body!

How industriously is Satan served! I was formerly one of his most active under-tempters! Not content with running down the broad way which leads to destruction by myself—I was indefatigable in enticing others! And, had my influence been equal to my wishes—I would have carried the whole human race to hell with me! And doubtless some have perished, to whose destruction I was greatly instrumental, by tempting them to sin, and by poisoning and hardening them with principles of infidelity. And yet I was spared! When I think of the most with whom I spent my ungodly days of ignorance, I am ready to say, "I alone have escaped alive!"

Surely I have not half the activity and zeal in the service of Him who snatched me as a brand out of the burning—as I had in the service of His enemy! Then the whole stream of my endeavors and affections went one way; now my best desires are continually crossed, counteracted, and spoiled, by the sin which dwells in me! Then the tide of a corrupt nature bore me along; now I have to strive and swim against it.

The Lord has cut me short of opportunities, and placed me where I could do but little mischief—but had my abilities and opportunities

been equal to my heart desires—I would have been a monster of profaneness and profligacy! A common drunkard or profligate is a petty sinner—compared to what I once was. I had unabated ambition, and wanted to rank in wickedness among the foremost of the human race! "O to grace how great a debtor—daily I'm constrained to be!" "By the grace of God—I am what I am!" 1 Corinthians 15:10

But I have rambled. I meant to tell you, that on Sunday afternoon I preached from "Why will you die?" Ezekiel 33:10-11. I endeavored to show poor sinners, that if they died—it was because they would; and if they would—they must. I was much affected for a time. I could hardly speak for weeping, and some wept with me. From some, alas! I can no more draw a tear or a serious thought, than from a millstone!

November 27, 1778

My dear friend,

You are a better expositor of Scripture than of my speeches—if you really inferred from my last that I think you shall die soon. I cannot say positively you will not die soon, because life at all times is uncertain. However, according to the doctrine of probabilities, I think, and always thought, you bid fair enough to outlive me. The gloomy tinge of your weak spirits—led you to consider yourself much worse in point of health than you appear to me to be.

In the other point I dare be more positive, that, die when you will—you will die in the Lord. Of this I have not the least doubt; and I

believe you doubt of it less, if possible, than I, except in those darker moments when the evil humor prevails.

I heartily sympathize with you in your illnesses—but I see you are in safe hands! The Lord loves you—and He will take care of you. He who raises the dead—can revive your spirits when you are cast down. He who sets bounds to the sea, and says "Hitherto shall you come, and no further," can limit and moderate those illnesses which sometimes distresses you. He knows why He permits you to be thus exercised. I cannot assign the reasons—but I am sure they are worthy of His wisdom and love, and that you will hereafter see and say, "He has done all things well!"

I do not like to puzzle myself with *second causes*, while the first cause is at hand, which sufficiently accounts for every phenomenon in a believer's experience. Your constitution, your situation, your temper, your distemper, all that is either comfortable or painful in your lot—is of his appointment! The hairs of your head are all numbered. The same power which produced the planet Jupiter—is necessary to the production of a single hair! Nor can one your hairs fall to the ground without His notice—any more than the stars can fall from their orbits! In providence, no less than in creation—He is the absolute Sovereign and Ruler.

Therefore fear not—only believe. Our sea may sometimes be stormy—but we have an infallible Pilot, and shall infallibly gain our port!

My dear friend,

I have heard of Mr. Palmer's dismissal from this state of sin and pain. Though *old* people *must* die, the stroke will be felt by near

friends whenever it comes. But the loss of those who die in the Lord should not be *long* or *deeply* mourned. They are gone a little before us — and we hope to meet them soon again, and upon far better terms, when there will be no abatement of joy, and when joy shall have no end. I hope Jesus, the everlasting Father, who never dies, will comfort and bless his wife under all changes and events.

I hope your weak spirits, strengthened by the great and good Spirit of the Lord, have happily surmounted what you have lately had to go through, and that you rejoice to think that in less than a hundred years your turn will come to go and see your Beloved, and that in the mean time you will preach, and act, and speak for him as much as possible. When will you come and tell me something about him? Let me expect you on Friday, or any day but Wednesday, because I shall then be at Weston. My dear wife is tolerably well at present — but sometimes complaining a little; I should say, *ailing*; for I hope she is sensible she has no reason to complain. I write in great haste. Adieu; may the Lord bless you.

I am yours entirely,

John Newton

October, 1778

My dear friend,

Your letters are always welcome; the last doubly so, for being unexpected. If you never heard before, of a letter of yours being useful, I will tell you for once, that I get some pleasure and instruction whenever you write to me. And I see not but your call to

letter-writing is as clear as mine, at least when you are able to put pen to paper.

I must say something to your queries about 2 Samuel 14. I do not approve of the scholastic distinctions about inspiration, which seem to have a tendency to explain away the authority and certainty of at least one half of the Bible. Though the penmen of Scripture were ever so well informed of some facts, they would, as you observe, need express, full, and infallible inspiration, to teach them which things the Lord would have selected and recorded for the use of the church, among many others which to themselves might appear equally important.

However, with respect to historical passages, I dare not pronounce positively that any of them are, even in the literal sense, unworthy of the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and the dignity of inspiration. Some, yes, many of them, have often appeared trivial to me—but I check the thought, and charge it to my own ignorance and temerity. It must have some importance, because I read it in God's book. On the other hand, though I will not deny that they may all have a spiritual and mystical sense, (for I am no more qualified to judge of the deep things of the Spirit, than to tell you what is passing this morning at the bottom of the sea,) yet if, with my present quota of light, I would undertake to expound many passages in a mystical sense—I fear such a judge as you would think my interpretations fanciful and not well supported. I suppose I would have thought the Bible complete, though it had not informed me of the death of Rebekah's nurse, or where she was buried. But some tell me that Deborah is the law, and that by the oak I am to understand the cross of Christ—and I remember to have heard of a preacher who discovered a type of Christ crucified in Absalom hanging by the hair on another oak. I am quite a mole when compared with these eagle-eyed divines; and must

often content myself with plodding upon the lower ground of accommodation and allusion; except when the New-Testament writers assure me what the mind of the Holy Spirit was, I can find the Gospel with more confidence in the history of Sarah and Hagar, than in that of Leah and Rachel; though, without Paul's help, I should have considered them both as family squabbles, recorded chiefly to illustrate the general truth—that vanity and vexation of spirit are incident to the best men, in the most favored situations.

And I think there is no part of Old Testament history from which I could not (the Lord helping me) draw observations, that might be suitable to the pulpit, and profitable to his people. But then, with the Bible in my hands, I go upon sure grounds. I am certain of the facts I speak from, that they really did happen. I may likewise depend upon the springs and motives of actions, and not amuse myself and my hearers with speeches which were never spoken, and motives which were never thought of, until the historian rummaged his pericranium for something to embellish his work. I doubt not, but were you to consider Joab's courtly conduct only in a literal sense, how it tallied with David's desire, and how gravely and graciously he granted himself a favor, while he professed to oblige Joab; I say in this view, you would be able to illustrate many important scriptural doctrines, and to show that the passage is important to those who are engaged in studying the anatomy of the human heart.

I have said enough or too much. I could, after all, preach very willingly upon God's devising means to bring his banished home again, and take occasion to lisp my poor views of that mysterious and adorable contrivance, without taking upon me to say that either Joab or the woman of Tekoa thought of the gospel when they cooked up that affair between them, or that even it was the express design of the

Holy Spirit, in the place. These points are always true, and always to be remembered, asserted, and repeated:

1st. That man, by the entrance of sin, is a banished creature, driven far away from God, from righteousness, from happiness.

2nd. That he must have remained in this state of banishment forever, if God had not devised to bring him home again.

3rd. That these means are worthy the Divine contriver, full of glory, holiness, wisdom, and efficacy.

4th. Man, who was far off, is by faith actually restored and brought near by Jesus Christ.

Had it not been for Joab's courtly conduct, we would not have been favored with this expression, so apt and suitable for the basis of a gospel sermon; nor could I have been gratified with your thoughts upon the subject, or have had the pleasure of presenting you with mine.

I am sorry for your bodily complaints — but hope I may ascribe a part of them to low spirits; I am therefore unwilling to think you so bad as you think yourself. We are pretty well. Love to Mrs. Bull.

Believe me most sincerely yours,

John Newton

Dear Sir,

I shall expect you with earnestness on Tuesday, and I hope the weather, and especially illness, will not prevent you; and I beg you not to listen too much to that lowness of spirits which would persuade you, I suppose, to confine yourself always at home; because I am satisfied, that when you can muster strength to withstand this depressing, discouraging solicitation, and force yourself to ride and chat with some friend, you take the best course for relief; and, among all the friends you may think of treating with your company on such occasions, be sure none will be more glad to receive you than your friend at the Olney Vicarage!

I think my feelings will warrant me to make that line my own. The Lord has been pleased to put some *grains of sympathy* into my constitution; and the difficult turns of life I have passed through, have not been unuseful to give me some apprehension what impression *afflictions* make upon other people. It is true, I have not been much exercised with nervous complaints myself — but my situation here has afforded me a sort of second-hand experience of this kind, for I have lived almost fourteen years among a people dear to my heart, many of whom, to their other various trials, have that of a delicate and agitated nervous texture superadded, (owing in great measure, I suppose, to their *sedentary* and *confined* occupations,) which has given much scope to my observation and compassion.

I understand something of your complaint, and know how to pity you; but, since you say all is well, and shall be well — since you are in the *wise* and *merciful* hands of One who prescribes for you with unerring wisdom, and has unspeakably more tenderness than can be found in all human hearts taken together — I shall sorrow for you as though I sorrowed not; and I hope you will do the same for yourself. He weighs all your painful dispensations with consummate accuracy, and you shall not have a single *grain* of trouble more, not for a single

moment longer — than he will enable you to bear, and will sanctify to your good.

As to *our death* — let it suffice us that it is precious in his sight. The how, the when, the where — every circumstance, is already planned by infinite wisdom and love. Satan may suggest that the hour will be terrible; but Jesus promises to be with us to lead us through the dark valley; and when we come to the brink of the *river*, I trust we shall find the ark there before us, to keep the waters down.

I have been preaching from a text tonight which I recommend as a suitable cordial for you in your present situation, Isaiah 41:17, "When the poor and needy seek water," etc. May the Lord himself apply and fulfill it to your comfort. Meditate upon it until you come, and then tell me more of it than I have been able to speak about it, which you may easily do, for I have only skimmed upon the *surface* and *edge* — of what has neither bottom nor bound.

I am running on as if you were on the other side of the Atlantic, or as though I had given up the hope of seeing you so soon as Tuesday. Come, if possible. I will endeavor to be alone, and will no more blab my expectation of your company, than I would if I had found a pot of honey, and was afraid of my neighbors breaking in upon me for a share.

Mrs. Newton joins in love, and will be glad to receive you, and will excuse you if you should feel but poorly. Our respects to Mrs. Bull. The rest when we meet. May the Lord come with you, then it will be a good visit.

I am affectionately and sincerely your friend, brother, and servant,

John Newton

Olney, 18 Dec, 1778, nine in the evening.

My dear friend,

You say you hate *controversy* — so do I; and therefore I beg nothing that passes between you and I, in our friendly researches after truth, may be included under so frightful a name. You and I may propose, debate, and sometimes differ — but I think it unlikely that we should ever *dispute*.

I am glad your fever is gone. I hope that all dark, unpleasant thoughts will vanish like mists before the midsummer sun, and that you will have a cheerful Christmas, a comfortable close of the old year, and a happy entrance upon the new.

I have not yet time to think of Christmas texts for this year — but I send you two old ones, if you can pick a hint or two it is well — and I and my hints will be honored.

My dear wife was very ill, indeed, last Wednesday night. After suffering about eight hours, the Lord relieved her. It seemed to me as if it might have been *fatal* in a few more hours. What a mercy to have an *infallible Physician* always within call, always in the house! Oh! what a precious present help in trouble! Help us to praise him. She is tolerable — but has not yet recovered the shock. She thanks you and Mrs. Bull for your love and returns it.

Adieu, in great haste — but always your most affectionate,

John Newton

Dear Sir,

Thank you for the *savory dish* which you sent me in your last post, I hashed it up my own way, and set it before my people on Christmas morning, and hope some of them fed heartily upon it. In the evening I preached from John 10:10.

What have you for *New Year's* day? I am not yet provided for the old folks in the forenoon. To the youth in the evening I think to preach from Jeremiah 3:19. Chiefly to resolve the difficulty which occurs among the children, considering them

1. as guilty

2. as obstinate.

Sovereign grace alone could surmount these difficulties. Grace has provided a Savior to take away the *guilt*, and the agency of the Holy Spirit to overcome the *obstinacy*, to give ground, liberty, and power to call God, Father: then all is easy. This is the principal thought I have in view. Pray for me, that I may open my mouth to speak boldly, plainly, affectionately, and successfully. We are tolerably well.

We wish you, and Mrs. Bull, a comfortable close of this year, and a happy entrance upon the next. And so with our joint love we bid you hearty farewell.

Yours in the best bonds,

John Newton

29th Dec.

My dear Mr. Bull,

My dear wife is ill again, a most violent pain in her head has lasted about thirty hours and, still continues. Pray for her; I wish you not to expect me either Tuesday or Wednesday. Mr. Scott and his wife are both very ill of a putrid fever. He caught it by attendance on the sick poor. *A noble wound!* Shall soldiers risk their lives, and stand as a mark for great guns, for sixpence a day, or for worldly honor? and is it not worth venturing something in imitation of Him who went about doing good, and when the good we aim at is for his sake? However, by his illness, and while it remains, I shall be confined at home that I may be within his call.

Love to Mrs. Bull. I am in great haste, and with great sincerity,

Your affectionate

John Newton

February 23, 1779

My dear friend,

On Saturday I heard you had been ill. Had the news reached me sooner, I would have sent you a letter sooner. I hope you will be able to inform me that you are now better, and that the Lord continues to do you *good* by every dispensation he *allots* you. Healing and wounding are equally from His hand—and are equally tokens of His love and care over us! "The Lord *gives*—and the Lord *takes away*. Praise the name of the Lord!" Job 1:21.

I have but little affliction in my own person—but I have been oftentimes chastened of late *by proxy*. The Lord, for his people's sake, is still pleased to give me health and strength for public service. But, when I need the rod — he lays it upon my dear wife! In this way I have felt much—without being disabled or laid aside. But he has heard prayer for her likewise, and for more than a two weeks—she has been comfortably well. I lay at least one half of her sickness to my own account. She suffers for me, and I through her. It is, indeed, touching me in a tender part. Perhaps if I could be more wise, watchful, and humble—it might contribute more to the re-establishment of her health, than all the medicine she takes!

The last of my sermons was a sort of historical discourse, from Deut. 32:15; in which, running over the leading national events from the time of Wycliffe, I endeavored to trace the steps and turns by which the Lord has made us a fat and thriving people; and in the event blessed us, beyond his favorite Jeshurun of old, with civil and religious liberty, peace, honor, and prosperity, and Gospel privileges. How fat we were when the war terminated in the year 1763, and how we have kicked and forsaken the Rock of our salvation of recent years! Then followed a sketch of our present state and spirit as a people, both in a religious and political view. I startled at the picture while I drew it, though it was a very inadequate representation. We seemed willing to afflict our souls for one day, Isaiah 58:5. But the next day things returned into their former channel. The sermon seemed presently forgotten, except by a few simple souls, who are despised and hated by the rest for their preciseness, because they think sin ought to be lamented every day in the year.

Who would envy Cassandra her gift of prophecy upon the terms she had it—that her declarations, however true, should meet with no belief or regard by her hearers? It is the lot of all Gospel ministers,

with respect to the bulk of their hearers. But blessed be the grace which makes a few exceptions! Here and there, one will hear, believe, and be saved. Everyone of these converts is worth a world! Our success with a few—should console us for all our trials.

Come and see us as soon as you can, only not tomorrow, for I am then to go to T****. My Lord, the Great Shepherd, has one sheep there, related to the fold under my care. I can seldom see her, and she is very ill. I expect she will be soon removed to the pasture above. Give our love to your dear wife.

John Newton

August 19, 1779

My dear friend,

Among the rest of temporal mercies, I would be thankful for pen, ink, and paper, and the convenience of the postal system, by which means we can waft a thought to a friend when we cannot be with him. My will has been to see you—but you must accept the will for the deed. The Lord has not permitted me.

I have been troubled of late with the rheumatism in my left arm. Mine is a sinful, vile body, and it is a mercy that any part of it is free from pain. It is virtually the seat and subject of all diseases—but the Lord holds them, like wild beasts in a chain, under a strong restraint. Was that restraint taken off, they would rush upon their prey from every quarter, and seize upon every limb, member, joint, and nerve—at once. Yet, though I am a sinner, and though my whole body is so frail and exposed, I have enjoyed for a number of years, an almost

perfect exemption both from pain and sickness. This is wonderful indeed, even in my own eyes.

But my soul is far from being in a healthy state. There I have labored, and still labor, under a complication of diseases; and—but for the care and skill of an infallible Physician, I must have died long ago. At this very moment my soul is feverish, dropsical, paralytic. I feel a loss of appetite, a disinclination both to food and to medicine—so that I am alive by miracle. yet I trust I shall not die—but live, and declare the works of the Lord. When I faint he revives me again. I am sure he is able, and I trust he has promised to heal me—but how inveterate must my disease be, that is not yet subdued, even under his management!

Well, my friend, there is a land where the inhabitants shall no more say, "I am sick." Then my eyes will not be dim, nor my ear heavy, nor my heart hard! One sight of Jesus as he is—will strike all sin forever dead!

Blessed be his name for this glorious hope! May it cheer us under all our present uneasy feelings, and reconcile us to every cross. The way must be right, however rough, that leads to such a glorious end!

O for more of His gracious influence, which in a moment can make my wilderness-soul rejoice and blossom like the rose! I want something which neither critics nor commentators can help me to. The Scripture itself, whether I read it in Hebrew, Greek, French, or English, is a sealed book in all languages, unless the Spirit of the Lord is present to expound and apply it to my heart! Pray for me. No prayer seems more suitable to me than that of the Psalmist. "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise your name."

John Newton

April 23, 1779

My dear friend,

May I not style myself a friend, when I remember you after the interval of several weeks since I saw you, and through a distance of sixty miles? But the truth is, you have been neither absent nor distant from my heart for even a day. Your idea has traveled with me; you are a kind of familiar, very often before the eye of my mind. This, I hope, may be admitted as a proof of friendship.

I know the Lord loves you, and you know it likewise. Every affliction affords you a fresh proof of it. How wise is his management in our trials! How wisely adjusted in season, weight, continuance, to answer his gracious purposes in sending them! How unspeakably better to be at his disposal—than at your own! So you say; so you think; so you find. You trust in him, and shall not be disappointed. Help me with your prayers, that I may trust him too, and be at length enabled to say without reserve, "What you will, when you will, how you will." I had rather speak these three sentences from my heart, in my mother-tongue, than be master of all the languages in Europe.

August 28, 1779

My dear friend,

I want to hear how you are. I hope your illness is not worse than when I saw you. I hope you are easier, and will soon find yourself able to move about again. I would be sorry, if, to the symptoms of the

kidney stone, that you would have the gout in your right hand—for then you will not be able to write to me.

We go on much as usual; sometimes very poorly, sometimes a little better—the latter is the case today. My rheumatism continues—but it is very moderate and tolerable. The Lord deals gently with us, and gives us many proofs—that he does not afflict willingly.

The days speed away apace! Each one bears away its own burden with it—to return no more. Both pleasures and pains which are past—are gone forever. What is yet future will likewise be soon past. The final end will soon arrive! O to realize the thought, and to judge of things now in some measure suitable to the opinion we shall form of them, when we are about to leave them all! Many things which now either elate or depress us—will then appear to be trifles as light as air!

One thing is needful—to have our hearts united to the Lord in humble faith; to set him always before us; to rejoice in him as our Shepherd and our portion; to submit to all his appointments, not of necessity, because he is stronger than us—but with a cheerful acquiescence, because he is wise and good, and loves us better than we do ourselves; to feed upon his truth; to have our understandings, wills, affections, imaginations, memory—all filled and impressed with the great mysteries of redeeming love; to do all for him, to receive all from him, to find all in him. I have mentioned many things—but they are all comprised in one, a life of faith in the Son of God. We are empty vessels in ourselves—but we cannot remain empty. Except Jesus dwells in our hearts, and fills them with his power and presence, they will be filled with folly, vanity, and vexation.

My dear friend,

I have been at the great house.* I could have wished for a more favorable account of your illness — but you are in the Lord's hand — in the hand of Him who loves you better than I do — better than you can love yourself! He will therefore order all things concerning you, and give you *strength* according to your day. This great Physician can support and heal — when other physicians are found to be of no value.

I am waiting with suspense for a further account of the war-fleets. If the news proves unfavorable, it will come soon enough to us all. Now perhaps is the crisis, or perhaps before now the blow is struck. My soul, wait only upon God — he directs the storm, and he can hush it into a calm. He loves his people, and numbers the hairs of their head. Whatever may be his purpose towards the *nation*, he says to his own *people* — it shall be well with them.

Here I was interrupted by a visit from Mrs. Foster; she has just left us, and I am just going to the great house and therefore cannot fill up my paper as usual. I wish the bearer may bring me a better account of you. May the Lord fill you with his peace. We join in love to you and Mrs. Bull. I am constrained to subscribe myself in haste,

Affectionately yours,

John Newton

Olney, 7 Sept. 1779.

* What is called the great house, was an ancient mansion, then unoccupied, and now pulled down, in which Mr. Newton rented a room, where meetings were held for prayer, and exposition of the

word of God. In this room Mr. Bull sometimes preached for Mr. Newton. I have by me a list of names, in the hand-writing of Mr. Newton, of these letters, of the people who engaged in prayer; and it is interesting to observe among them the frequent recurrence of the name of the poet **William Cowper**, from the year when he came to reside at Olney, to the year 1773, when a dark cloud came over his mind, and peculiar views of himself unhappily prevented him from entering a place of worship to the end of his days. So strictly conscientious was this interesting man, that I have frequently seen him sit down at table when others have risen to implore a blessing, and take his knife and fork in hand, to signify, I presume, that he had no "right to pray." "Prove to me" (he writes) "that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing, even in the belly of this hell, compared with which Jonah's was a palace, a temple of the living God." — Southey's "Cowper," vol. iv. p. 235.

My dear friend,

I wish you may be able to send us word by the bearer, that your illness is removed, or at least abated. If not, still I hope He favors you with soul peace and resignation to his will.

My *race* at the *Olney* church is nearly finished. I am about to form a connection for life with a church in Woolnoth, London. I hope you will not blame me; I think you would not if you knew all circumstances. However, my *conscience*, through mercy, is clear; and my *path*, in my own view, and in the judgment of several of my most spiritual friends, is plainly the path of duty. I hope and beg you will pray for me.

Indeed I am not elated at what the world calls *preferment*. London is the last situation I would have chosen for myself. The throng and hurry of the *business* world, and noise and party contentions of the *religious* world — are very disagreeable to me. I love woods and fields, and streams and trees; to hear the birds sing, the sheep bleat. I love retreat and rural life, such as I have been happy here for more than fifteen years. I thank the Lord for his goodness to me here. Here I have rejoiced to live; here I have often wished and prayed that I might die. I am sure no outward change can make me happier — but it does not befit a soldier, to choose his own post.

On Tuesday we purpose going to Northampton, and to return by Newport on Thursday, take a bit of dinner, and change a few expressions of love with you and Mrs. Bull, and home early in the afternoon, because I am to preach in the evening.

It is a *weeping time* with us at Olney — my people feel each one for themselves; but I must and do feel for them all. But I trust the Lord will provide them a pastor after his own heart.

Adieu. Pray for us. May the Lord bless you, both you, and your children.

I am most affectionately yours,

John Newton

Olney, 25 Sept. 1779.

My dear friend,

Do not say, do not think, that I have forgotten you. I have waited to tell you some news, until I can wait no longer. The Lord gave us a safe and comfortable journey, and my dear wife has been comfortably well since we came here. I delivered my presentation to the bishop's secretary on Friday last, and on Sunday I received notice that a caveat was lodged against my institution by some person or people who pretend to dispute Mr. Thornton's right of presenting. This counter-claim causes a delay or suspense — but, it is thought, will soon appear to be groundless.

However, through mercy, your poor friend feels himself very easy about the event. The affair is where I would have it — in the Lord's hand. If He *fixes* me here — I humbly hope and believe he will *support* me, and it shall be for good. If He appoints otherwise, I trust it will be no grief of heart to me to return to Olney, where I shall be within five miles of dear Mr. Bull. I am, however, glad I accepted the offer, whatever the outcome may be.

Noisy London, and its unsettled, hurrying kind of life — is not quite to my tooth! I believe if I settle in London, I shall entreat Him, in whose hands all my affairs, the greatest and the smallest, are, in his good providence — to prepare me a habitation somewhere about the outskirts of the town, where I may enjoy some measure of privacy, fresh air, and see the green fields and trees at no great distance from me. This will be the more feasible, as the *parsonage* house is occupied by the post office, which seems to furnish me with a fair excuse for not residing in the parish.

Though many things will occasionally force themselves upon my thoughts, I trust, in answer to your prayers for me, the Lord will help me to remember that one thing is needful — and, comparatively speaking, one only. It matters little whether I live and die in *Olney* or

London — in the city or the suburbs — provided I am where He would have me be, favored with his light and grace and consolation — and qualified, by his holy anointing — to honor, love, and serve him, in *whatever circumstances his wisdom may appoint*.

Mr. Foster is now at Olney, and I have entered upon his services, which amount to eleven sermons in a two weeks. Upon my first coming there — I preached from 1 Thessalonians 5:25, "Brethren, pray for us;" when, after giving them some account of the *difficulties* and *trials* attending the *ministerial office* in general, I endeavored to engage the prayers of many in my behalf, with respect to the new prospect before me. Surely I shall need a singular communication of divine wisdom, zeal, meekness, and fortitude, in a London situation.

Brother, pray for me, and may the Lord enable you to pray in faith. My *weaknesses* are many. I am but a *child* to go in and out before a great people, and to stand in a conspicuous and important post. But the Lord is a good and all-sufficient Master, and I would wrong his goodness and faithfulness — were I to question his promise of *strength* according to my day. Should this relocation take place, I hope the outcome will show it is the Lord's doing. Had not the proposal come to me *unexpected, unsolicited*, I think I may honestly add, *undesired* — and so circumstanced, that neither my own judgment, nor the advice of some of my most spiritual friends would permit me to decline it, without a fear of opposing His will — I say, could I not view it in this light, I would be uneasy, and afraid of the experiment. But now I can trust that if God brings me hither — his presence will be with me. My poor mistaken people, by their hasty refusal of Mr. Scott, have given me a pain which I did not expect. But I cannot help it. May the Lord overrule it for good, and provide better pastor for them than they can expect.

While *we* can meet daily at a throne of grace, and exchange a letter when we please — let us not think ourselves far asunder. Your company has been pleasing and edifying to me, and I shall sensibly miss it. But our friendship will be inviolable. You have a near and warm place in my heart, and will retain it as long as life continues. I confidently expect the same on your part. I long to hear how you do — shall be thankful to know you are getting better, and especially to be told that all your painful dispensations are evidently *sanctified*, and that you have that peace which can exist and flourish in affliction. My dear wife joins in love to you and Mrs. Bull, and your *two young plants*. May the Lord make them *plants of renown*; may they increase in wisdom as in years, and grow up to his praise and your comfort.

Adieu. Send me a letter soon. And believe me to be most affectionately your faithful friend and brother,

John Newton

14th October, 1779.

October 26, 1779

(Mr. Newton refers to a *severe trial* through which Mr. Bull had passed three days before, in the *sudden death of a dear child, five years old*, after he had been bereaved of four other children, one only surviving.

The following is an extract from Mr. Bull's letter, dated Oct. 23, announcing this painful event:

Dear sir, pray for me. My bodily pain is great, the sorrow in my heart is real; but the love of the Lord is the same. Oh! how I rejoice in *him* this day, while I grieve in *self*. I seem to long to be where my dear *Polly* is; and, blessed be my God, I shall go there some day, perhaps soon. My *dear lamb* has revealed a peculiar sweetness of temper these three or four months, and a fondness for reading quite remarkable. For five or six weeks she had got up before me in the morning to read a Scripture chapter to me while I was dressing; and one day she cried very much because I got up before her. She gave me great delight by this practice, and it was her own. This is a pleasant tale to me, and you can excuse it. The *lamb* looks exceedingly beautiful now she is laid out; but, oh! my faith sees her spirit in the hands and heart of God my Savior, and that delights me. My dear wife is very poorly; and poor *lonely Tommy* is tolerable, and is kept for some future trial.

I wish that I may silently rejoice in my Savior for cutting off all sources of *comfort*, but himself. Indeed it does look as if he would have my whole heart, and would make everything else taste bitter that he may taste the sweeter. As lately as yesterday, my dear child read me Psalm 25 before I was up. Oh! how little did I think affliction and death were so near!)

My dear friend,

I feel for you a little in the same way as you feel for yourself. I bear a friendly sympathy in your late sharp and sudden trial. I mourn with that part of you which mourns—but at the same time I rejoice in the proof you have, and which you give, that the Lord is with you in truth. I rejoice on your account, to see you supported and comforted, and enabled to say, "He has done all things well!"

I rejoice on my own account. Such instances of his faithfulness and all-sufficiency are very encouraging. We must all expect times of trouble in our turns. We must all feel in our concernments, the vanity and uncertainty of creature comforts. What a mercy is it to know from our own past experience, and to have it confirmed to us by the experience of others—that the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and that he knows those who trust in him.

All creatures are like candles; they waste away—while they afford us a little light, and we see them extinguished in their sockets one after another. But the light of the sun makes amends for them all. The Lord is so rich that he easily can, so good that he certainly will—give his children more than he ever will take away! When his gracious voice reaches the heart, "It is I—do not be afraid! Be still—and know that I am God!" when he gives us an impression of his wisdom, power, love, and care—then the storm which attempts to rise in our natural passions is hushed into a calm; the flesh continues to feel—but the spirit is made willing, and something more than submission takes place—a sweet resignation and acquiescence, and even a joy that we have anything which we value, to surrender to his call.

Love and best wishes to you and Mrs. Bull from your most affectionate friend,

John Newton

My dear friend,

How are you? and what are you about? I am afraid that either your spirits are grown weak, or your memory fails you a little. Pluck up your courage; then remember how much you are beloved by a local

sojourner, and send Dr. Ford a letter, or at least a note; if it be but three lines, he will gladly pay three-pence for them to the post-man.

The church in Woolnoth and I are not yet *married*. I told you somebody forbade the plans, and the prohibition is not yet taken off. Nothing has been done, or attempted to be, within these two days; but I believe we shall soon hasten into the midst of things. The Lord still enables me to abide by the surrender I made of the affair into his hands, and I wait the event with a *tranquility* almost approaching to *indifference*. However, in my private judgment, it appears much more probable that the bar will be removed, and the match take place, than the contrary. But until it is determined, I wish to consider it as an uncertainty.

To *wed* the church in Woolnoth — is in some respects pleasing; but then to be *divorced* from Olney — will be in many respects painful. Again, to leave Olney will free me from many known and sharply felt inconveniences; but then, to live in London may expose me to other trials, which though at present unknown, may be equally sharp to my feelings. What a comfort this, that when "I am in a strait between two, and what to choose I know not," the Lord will mercifully condescend to choose for me! What a comfort that when we are quite dead as to consequences — He has promised to *see* for us, with his infinite and unerring eye!

Tell Mrs. Bull we love you both, have felt for you both, and shall be glad to hear that you are both pretty well. The Lord *loves* you likewise — and therefore he *afflicts* you. He has given you grace — and therefore he appoints you *trials*, that the grace he has given may be preserved and manifested to his praise. He has made you a good soldier, and therefore he appoints you a post of honor. You are not merely to walk about in a soldier's coat, at a distance from the noise

and danger of war, and to brandish your sword without any risk of meeting an enemy; but he sends you down to the *field of battle*. You *feel* as well as *hear* — that our profession is a warfare; and you feel as well as hear, likewise — that the Lord is with you, fights for you, and supports you with strength, and covers your head in the day of conflict.

Accept this love token, and pay me in kind. I have not time to enlarge. I wish you a good night and a good morrow. Tomorrow! It is the Lord's day. May we be in the Spirit. I think to be a hearer in the forenoon at the Brethren's Chapel — to hear Mr. Latrobe, if he preaches. In the afternoon (if I do not alter my mind), I shall say something myself about a treasure — and the earthen, worthless, brittle vessels the Lord is pleased to put it in, even into such a *foul piece of clay* as your very poor — but very affectionate friend,

John Newton

London, Nov. 20th, 1779.

My dear friend,

I must write a short letter today, for many of my friends will expect to hear the outcome of my long waiting in town. The Lord's hour came in due time, and yesterday the Bishop gave me the pastorate of St. Mary Woolnoth, and tomorrow I am to be inducted — that is, put into possession of the key and the bell-rope, and thereby installed in all the rights, uses, and profits of the employment. So the *curate of Olney* is now transplanted and placed in the number of the *London* rectors. How little did I think of this when I was living, or rather *starving* — when a slave in Africa!

"The *sport* of slaves,

Or, what's more wretched still, their *pity*."

But the Lord is Sovereign and Almighty. He chooses and does what is well-pleasing in his sight. Whom he will — he slays; whom he will — he keeps alive. What cause for praise, that it pleased him to extend his mercy to you and I.

Many *wish* me joy. You, I believe, will *pray* and wish for me — that I may have much *grace*, and be favored with wisdom, fidelity, zeal, and meekness suited to the demands of my new and important situation. Through mercy, I feel little in this new situation to elate me. I hope I see the Lord's hand and call in it, and so far it pleases me. My concern at leaving many whom I love dearly at Olney, and my solicitude about them — will in a good measure qualify things in the changes which otherwise are not disagreeable to flesh and blood. But I need not repeat this in a short letter, when I believe I have written to the same purpose already.

Thank you for your letter. Not having it with me, I cannot answer it particularly. In general I know you are afflicted — and comforted; sick — and well; sorrowful — yet always rejoicing. This *checker-work* will last while life lasts — but it will not last *always*. Deliverance is approaching, and in the meantime we know all things are *dispensed* to us by infinite wisdom — in number, weight, and measure — with a far greater accuracy than any doctor can adjust his *medicines* to the state and strength of his patients. My dear wife has a head-ache today — but I hope she will be better. When I tell her that I have joined her love with mine — to you and Mrs. Bull and Tommy, I am sure she will confirm it.

I hope to see Newport and Olney next week. I am in all places, and at all times, most affectionately yours,

John Newton

Dec. 1, 1779.

My dear friend,

Many an eager look I darted through my study-window this morning, in hopes of seeing you and your grey horse. I need not tell you I was sorry to miss my expected pleasure; but I was more sorry to learn the *cause* of your not coming, though I suspected it before I received your note. I long with a great longing to have you here — yet not so as to wish you should make the attempt at the price of pain and inconvenience to yourself. Supposing the Lord relieves you, and you are pretty well tomorrow, what do you think of coming — and returning when you have quite enough of us for one time? If I should be weary of you first, I will tell you so.

Until then I have two thoughts to comfort me:

1st, that we *love* each other;

2nd, that though we do we are not *necessary* to each other, your Lord and mine is equally near to us both; and a visit from him is sufficient to comfort either of us, though we were in the solitary situation of Robinson Crusoe.

Indeed, supposing you really have *the stone*, and that your pains are sharp and frequent, I would rather encourage you to submit to the *operation*, than dissuade you from it. But I understood that since

you had changed your medicine, you were, in general, free from pain. I would hope that He whom you serve, would support you under the *operation*, and bring you safely through it. If you judge it expedient, therefore, come to London, and consult an able surgeon; but by no means commit yourself to a *country practitioner*.

I hope soon to be in town. How glad shall I be to visit you in your confinement, daily, if possible; at least, often! You will ask counsel at the throne of grace, and then do as the Lord shall determine your mind. If it be his will, you need not regard the *expense* or *consequences*. The Lord will provide!

My dear wife sends love to you, and Mrs. Bull and Tommy. She is doing poorly; so that though we talk of a speedy removal, we as yet can make no preparations for it. I believe I must return to London without her; for I promised to be there before the 16th, and must keep my word if possible. The paper bids me leave off — but I will not until I have once more assured you that I am very sincerely and affectionately yours,

John Newton

Olney, Jan. 3, 1780

My dear friend,

I must send this messenger to inquire after your welfare, to inform you of my own, to thank you for all your love, and to charge you to believe that you have a warm place in my heart.

Through mercy, I am well and comfortable; feel a little left-handed and awkward for lack of my dear wife, as I usually do in her absence.

'Tis true, I have cause enough for grief and humiliation for what passes within my heart; but then I have a friend, a rich, compassionate, powerful, unchangeable Friend; and the thought of him — *who* he is, *where* he is, *what* he has *done*, and what he is *doing* — somehow composes my mind and maintains my peace. Could he be taken from me, or my expectations founded upon him fail — I would instantly sink to the bottom of the bottomless pit of despair!

My entrance to *St. Mary Woolnoth* is hitherto as favorable as I could expect; indeed, more so. Some of my new parishioners are rather pleased, and some who do not quite relish what I say, seem to believe that — at least I speak from my heart and mean well. In my next parcel to Mrs. Newton (tomorrow), I will endeavor to send you my first address to them. I sent one of them to every house. It was in general well received, though the printer made a mercenary blunder, by printing them *for sale* — when I did not intend one should be sold, and fixing the price at sixpence for a single sheet, worth at the most but two-pence. We shall *divide the spoil* between us; he will get the *money* — and I shall get the *blame*. It will furnish a *handle* to some for representing me as very *ostentatious* in publishing my first sermon, and very *mercenary* for fixing the price so high! *What cannot be cured — must be endured*. The Lord knows *my intention* in printing it, and he is able to secure my character. I have endeavored to clear myself to a few, chiefly those in my own parish; but I cannot run about to tell everybody, nor is it needful. *Mr. Self* has been not a little mortified — but I tell him to sit still, and leave his cause in the Lord's hands.

I know not when my dear wife will come up — but I hope it will be in the Lord's best time. I would willingly hope to see her on Friday — but I hardly expect it. I hope you have been, or will go to see her, if

you are pretty well, and she stays after you receive this. If not, I wish you to treat her with a little letter by Friday's post. She desired me to ask you to write to her — but I forgot it. She loves to see you, and to hear from you.

Write to me, and if you can tell me you are pretty well, and free from pain — I shall rejoice; if you say you are coming to town, I shall rejoice more. I expect, however, you will inform me that the Lord stands by, and strengthens and comforts you; this will, or should rejoice me most of all.

My time is expended; I am going to the church prayer-meeting, if any people come — frequently there is not one. I will try them a while, and if they do not attend, I shall give up the Friday prayer-meeting and preach a sermon on Wednesday. I shall do so by and by — but not yet.

I must make no *hasty innovations*. You know that if a man has but a *horse* to break, he does not jump immediately upon his back, and make him feel the spur the first time he sees him. He begins softly, strokes him, feeds him, shows him the bridle before he attempts to put it on, and brings him forward by degrees. Poor sinners, and especially poor sinners that are *rich* — are at least as intractable and wild as horses and mules — and must be *humored a little* in matters where conscience is not directly concerned. I know that you will pray for me — that the Lord may give me *true wisdom* and *humble boldness*.

"With hearty love to Mrs. Bull and little Tommy,

I remain, my dear friend,

Your most affectionate,

John Newton

19th January, 1780.

My dear friend,

I once thought to defer writing a little longer, for the pleasure of telling you, that I sent you the very first letter I wrote in my new habitation; but then I must have waited another post, and possibly you are sufficiently angry with me already. If you have been in cheerful spirits, I knew your candor would prompt you to make *large allowances* for the unsettled state in which I have been; but if your thoughts have been of the gloomy cast, then my silence has appeared to you through an unfavorable medium, and bore, in your view, a strong resemblance to those frightful figures, *apathy* and *ingratitude*.

Prone as we are to indulge hard thoughts of the Lord — we have no right to be offended if our fellow-worms, even our dear friends, think hard of us, and therefore I forgive you, unasked, and beforehand, all the peevish and ill-founded *surmises* which may at any time have found a place in your peri-cranium concerning me, as if I did not dearly love you, or greatly care for you, or set a high value upon your letter — because I have not yet answered it.

Nay, I cannot answer it now, for I cannot find it! It is in some of my books, or boxes, or drawers, of which yesterday deprived me. For then, and about that time, some people came, and took all belongings, and lodged them in a house in Charles' Square; and there it seems I must go after them, if I intend to have any further use of them. At the same place and day there arrived a wagon from Olney

(larger, I believe, than any of the wagons sent to Jacob from Egypt) accompanied with a cart, both full of *my baggage*. This is amazing, as several years ago, I could have carried all my belongings in my pocket, from Dan even to Beersheba! Those words, "With my *staff* I came over this Jordan, and now I am become *two bands*," suit me almost as well as they suited him who first spoke them. I wish I could use them with equal sensibility.

My relocation, indeed, should affect me with double thankfulness, if compared with his; for I had no *angry Laban* to harass my rear, nor *threatening Esau*, to dispute my passage, and terrify me in front. All has been made as easy as possible. Our new *Bethel* (for it is already consecrated to be *God's house*) bids fair to be a pleasant and convenient abode. Perhaps we shall sleep in it tonight. When I write next I hope to be able to tell you that your room is fitted up for your reception, and then you must come and take possession of it as soon as possible. I have lately seen somebody who lately saw you, and had the pleasure of hearing that you were pretty well.

I forwarded you yesterday, a letter from Mrs. Weber. In a former letter to Mr. Foster, she says, the *gaiety* and *dissipation* of Petersburg can hardly be conceived of, by those who are only acquainted with such a faint expression of them as can be observed in London. I hope the grace of our Lord will make her a very *salamander*, for it seems she is to live in the midst of the fire. I both fear and hope for her. I know that God is able to over-power all the *glare of the world*, by one glance of the light of his countenance; but how few are able to exist, much more to thrive and grow in such a worldly situation!

Through mercy I feel myself quite at home there; and though I consider the state of my auditory, and avoid as much as I can giving

unnecessary disgust, I am enabled to speak very plainly to them. Some hear with *patience*, some I think with *attention*, some *refuse* to hear any more at present. Of these, a part go elsewhere, and a part nowhere — but the Lord can bring them again. I hope my heart longs for their salvation — but the *means* are my part, *success* is in the Lord's hands. I wish to be *earnest* — but not *anxious*.

I shall hope to hear a good account of your health, as I trust we are united in the strongest bands. I often think of you. We join in hearty love to you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. Pray for us; pray for Olney and Woolnoth. The Lord bless us all.

I am, your very affectionate, obliged brother, servant, and scholar,

John Newton

My dear friend,

Come magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. Be it known to you and Mrs. Bull, that I am very well, though on Tuesday morning I had a *fall*, and dislocated my shoulder. It was soon reset, and since the operation I have my arm in a sling, and have kept house hitherto — but hope to be at St. Mary Woolnoth's tomorrow.

Many leagues I have traveled by land and by water, many falls I have had, and many vain fears have I felt in apparent danger — but at this one time of my receiving hurt, *danger* was quite out of sight and out of thought. I was standing at my own door, put my foot carelessly back against a stone, which tripped me up, and threw me over a short post. I rose instantly, had no other hurt, bruise, or strain, only

the arm had slipped out of the socket. A surgeon was with me presently, and after being sometime pulled about by four men, the Lord mercifully recalled and guided the bone to its proper station, and I have felt no pain since — but eat, sleep, and converse as usual. When you have thanked the Lord for his goodness to me, add your prayers, that this and every other dispensation may be sanctified to us.

Thanks are due likewise on my dear wife's account. I felt and feared more for *her* than for myself. She was much alarmed, especially as I was, while under the surgeon's hands, before she could see me or know what hurt I had received. You know what frightful pictures *imagination* can draw in an hour of suspense — and how it stands aghast at its own portraits! But the Lord supported her, and she is now pretty well.

I do not mean to compliment you by calling myself *your scholar*. The Lord can teach by whom he pleases — and I am sure none can teach me without him. Nay, I doubt not but he can teach even you, and even by me. His power makes all instruments much upon a par; and *Balaam's donkey* was as well qualified to reprove his master, as Moses himself could have been. However, this I know, that I am, or ought to be, thankful that my acquaintance with you was renewed, and for every opportunity of smoking a pipe with you since that time. Let the advantage and pleasure of friendship be ours, let the praise for every benefit received be wholly given to the Lord, for we can only be to each other what he is pleased to make us.

I can write no more at present — but our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and request your prayers for me, and my dear, and my people.

I am most affectionately yours,

John Newton

15 April, 1780.

My dear friend,

Either you or I are a little faulty. I hope it is you, and I chide you for it — but very gently, for fear the chiding should properly belong to myself. However, I must and will chide you, for supposing (which I will not allow without proof) that you wrote last. You might have written again before this time. You have not such a multiplicity of subjects and objects to engross you as I am beset with.

The Bibles you received probably came from me; or rather from the Lord, through my hands. And, if he sent them, I trust you will find he sends a blessing with them. He will, likewise, direct you how to dispose of them.

The cure of my arm happily advanced without interruption, and it is now in a manner well; a little stiffness only remains, and it answers the purpose of a *barometer*, to give me notice of change of *weather*. Some tell me this will be an abiding infirmity, and I need not be sorry for a little occasional pain, if it should, at the same time, remind me of the Lord's goodness in preserving me from worse consequences. Mrs. Newton has comfortable health in her new situation. She sends her love with mine to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. I am sorry to say that we have not yet got our spare bed up — but I hope before long to inform you it is ready for you. I write this to go by Mr. Wilkinson, who purposes seeing Olney with his bride on Thursday. He is settled within about a hundred yards of me, which is a very agreeable circumstance.

We go on quietly and comfortably here at Woolnoth. I feel myself at home here, and have lately set up my Sunday evening lecture. My stated service now is three weekly sermons, and one monthly. I believe my parishioners make the smallest part of my auditory — but at this time of the year most of the principal folks are in the country. But I stand upon my post, and the Lord can persuade them to hear me whenever he pleases. In the mean time, the church is tolerably well filled without them.

I feel the loss of my retired rural walks at Olney — but I hope I am where I ought to be; and He whom I serve can compensate all *seeming inconveniences*. I have less time and less opportunity for secret waiting upon Him than formerly — but he is pleased to keep me in some measure alive. I would learn to count nothing as an *interruption*, because if I am broken in upon from morning until night when at home (as is frequently the case), I have reason to believe nobody comes to me — but those whom God sends; and I wish to be in such a frame of spirit as to feel myself equally present with him, and engaged in his service, whether at home or abroad, alone or in company.

This is the true secret of piety — not to wish that incidents and events were at our own disposal — but to have wisdom to improve them as they arise; and, like the mariner, so to suit my sails, as to avail myself to the utmost of every wind that blows. Oh for more of that simplicity and singleness of intention, which, like the much talked of alchemist's stone, turns all to gold, and sanctifies and *converts every action of common life*, into a part of that pious service which we owe to Him who bought us with his blood!

Excepting the lack of woods, and streams, and walks, where I may hide myself from the noise and throng of men, my situation is very

comfortable. A good convenient house, a tolerably open place, not much enveloped in the smoke of London. A walk of a mile or more to church is rather healthful than otherwise. I have exercise enough with an evil heart — but the enemy is not permitted greatly to harass me. I have seen some tall cedars sadly shaken, and almost overturned, by the storms of temptation which frequently blow here; but, I, though a *shrub* — am still sheltered and preserved.

The last of this month is fixed for the publication of the *infidel book* so much talked of. I feel a sort of trembling for its appearance. Much has been attempted to prevent its coming abroad — but in vain. The world are expecting it with an air of triumph. Let us pity and pray for the *author*. He ran well in time past, though now, alas! hindered and turned aside. Let us fear and pray for *ourselves*. We are not so *wise* but we may be misled, nor so *strong* but we may be thrown down — if left to ourselves. If the Lord maintains in us a humble, dependant spirit — we shall cry to him to hold us up, and so we shall be safe — but not otherwise. For my part, I dare not throw a stone at anyone — but may well take occasion, from the *fall of others* — to admire the grace which has hitherto preserved me from making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. I am shocked and wearied with what I hear from time to time of the advantages Satan gains over great professors.

Blessed be God, though your spirits are weak, and your health infirm — you have not given occasion for the way of truth to be evil spoken of. Oh, it is better to be sick, or lame, or dead, or burned alive, than to be of the number of those through whom offences come. Pray for us, and be assured that whether I write or not, I always feel myself to be your obliged and affectionate friend and servant,

John Newton

22nd May, 1780.

My dear friend,

Your kind, though brief inquiries, must be answered speedily, and, therefore, almost as briefly as you propose them. We have had a terrible storm — but our *infallible* Pilot has supported and brought us, thus far, safely through. The winds and waves have likewise subsided at his mighty command; and now all is tolerably calm. We have a war-like sort of peace. The city is full of soldiers; but the discipline and decency of conduct they observe, is truly admirable, beyond what I could have conceived possible to be maintained by so large a body of men.

Charles Square was full of people on Monday the 5th — but they behaved peaceably, made a few inquiries, and soon went away. We were apprehensive of their return, as there was a house in the square inhabited by a foreigner, and they were once afterwards at the corner of the next street. But He who has a hook and bridle in the mouths of those who think themselves their own masters — was pleased to turn them another way. We were preserved safe, and only suffered by sympathy with others, from what we heard with our ears and saw with our eyes, together with apprehensions of still more dreadful consequences, if the Lord did not interpose.

The devastations on Tuesday and Wednesday nights were horrible. We could count from our back windows six or seven terrible fires each night, which, though at a distance, were very affecting. On Wednesday night and Thursday, the military arrived and saved the city, which otherwise I think would, before this time, have been in ashes, from end to end. So soon, so suddenly, can danger arise; so

easily, so certainly, can the Lord set bounds to the wickedness of man, in the height of its rage, and say, "Hitherto shall you come, and no further."

I believe multitudes went to St. George's fields, in the simplicity of their hearts, not aware of the consequences, not aware that many, with very different views, would avail themselves of the occasion, and meet with them. So children sometimes play with gunpowder, and think themselves safe, until a spark sets all in a flame about their ears. The Lord permitted it, and he is wise and just and good, and knows how to bring good out of seeming evil. Mrs. Newton was marvelously supported while things were at the worst — but the incessant dangers we were in, had some effect, and she began to droop, when the greatest danger was over. Through mercy, she is now revived, and pretty well again; as, likewise, Sally and Peggy, who, poor things! were little prepared for such awful scenes.

I preached on Wednesday, and had a tolerable auditory; but I cannot describe the consternation and anxiety which were marked on the countenance of almost every person I met in the streets that day. I hope never again to see so strong an exemplification of many descriptions in the prophecies of Jeremiah. All faces gathered blackness indeed. Through mercy, I did not fear much for myself — but I felt for my little family, my neighbors, and especially for the public. The impression made upon my mind is not yet worn off, and, indeed, I ought not to wish I could quite forget it.

I preached on Sunday forenoon from Lam. 3:22. "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed." In the evening, from Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God."

I hope your next letter will tell us that you are better. We are glad to hear Mrs. Bull and Tommy are well. We join in love to them and to

you. Can you contrive to show this to Mr. Scott, for I have not time to write to him at present? Thank you for your prayers; I hope you will continue them. The Lord bless and keep you and yours.

Believe me to be your affectionate friend,

John Newton

Charles Square, London, June, 1780.

My dear friend,

Your letter came last night, and while I was reading it, *Mr. Self*, who is sometimes a little cross, as well as sly, whispered in my ear, "You would not have heard from him now, if it had not been for the occasion mentioned in the letter." But I snubbed him, and let him know that I would not admit any insinuation against Mr. Bull — that I would thank you for writing to me at all: I was determined not to stand upon punctilios.

I left your letter with Mr. Thornton, and having read it but once, my memory does not present any part of it that requires a particular answer. From the whole, I learn that you are *better* and *worse* as formerly; that if you are afflicted — you find it good to be so; if you have a cross — you are supported under it; and, if your *cross* is doubled — your *strength* is proportionately increased. You are enabled to trust the Lord, and you find him faithful. You prefer his wish to your own, and experience proves that he chooses better for you than you could choose for yourself. Thus all is well.

I now invite you to London. The storm I hope is past — the tumults over and gone. The executions which justice and a regard to the

public tranquility demand, will soon be finished. Come, for the bed and parlor and all things are now ready. Come, and see our us in our house, which, by dint of a warm imagination, we make to resemble Olney as much as possible. It is the same within doors, for we are the same people. The same Sir and Madam to receive you. The back parlor looks into a garden; and there is a field with cows in it.

We sometimes meet people in the street, whose features remind us of some whom we know in the country; but such a resemblance of you will not suffice. I must have your original identical person — therefore take a place, and come up as soon as possible; and may the Lord bless you upon the road, and come himself with you. Persuade Mrs. Bull to come likewise. I long for the time. How snugly shall we sit and smoke our pipes, while we settle the affairs of the state and of the churches!

Do you not rejoice in the prospect of peace and union with America again? How sudden — how seasonable was the turn! how unexpected, at least by me! Indeed I am a shallow politician. But let the wise men say what they will, I say it was the Lord's doing, and we had but little reason to expect so favorable an outcome. It was the *Lord* — but the praise is given by many to the *instruments*. Oh, wretched people! when afflicted — we murmur; when relieved — we boast. It is well there are a *praying few* among us, or we should be given up to ruin.

Could you send me three or four of my letters to you, (if you have not burnt them,) to stand among those which are now gone to the press? One of your youths might transcribe such extracts as you might think fit to mark off, free from such *trifles* as would be quite unfit for the public eye: none should be later than the close of last year, and they must come soon if at all. The Lord Jesus be with you, and with us all.

Love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. May he increase in grace and wisdom, as in years and stature. Adieu.

I am yours sincerely, affectionately, and obliged,

John Newton

Charles Square, July, 1780.

My dear friend,

Being resolved to keep you in my debt, I write immediately to inform you that your acceptable letter, with the packet of my own letters, came safe to hand last night.

My dear wife has what I call a comfortable measure of health — a few needful mementos of frailty — yet permitting her to eat, sleep, and converse with friends. The Lord is very good, and I have still a favored lot. Peace in the heart, in the parlor, in the kitchen, and in the house of God. Our whole little household love you, and desire to be remembered to you and by you.

I find you have still pains and indispositions — but as they are *sanctified* and *sweetened*, your case makes me both *sorry* and *glad* in the same breath. I am not so apprehensive of your constitution breaking up, as you seem to be; I hope you will live to a good old age, and your lips still feed many. If you are still doing quite poorly — come and try the air of Charles Square. I think it would do you good, and that even the journey would be of service to you. I would talk to you, my dear wife would nurse you, and you shall have Orinoco as much as you please and as often.

However, I can venture to promise you — that you shall live until your work is done, and I am pretty sure when the time of dismissal comes, you will rejoice in the *summons*. The Lord will smile upon you, and then you will smile upon death; for when death has lost his sting, he has an angel's face! We are going where we shall all know each other at first sight.

My dear wife sends her love to you, and Mrs. Bull and Tommy. "We beg many prayers.

I am yours most affectionately,

John Newton

Charles Square, 19th July, 1780.

My dear friend,

I am just come from Clapham, and it is now past two o'clock. I ought to sit down, and smooth and sort my thoughts, which are usually tumbled about by a two or three days absence from home, so that my heart upon a return, is something like a country shop on the evening of a fair day, and needs a deal of setting right. But then your letter says to please write, and my heart feels as if I ought to answer you. And, therefore, I must let my shop still be disheveled, until I have chalked you out a short answer to your inquiries.

Though in haste to satisfy you, I am in no haste for rectifying the minister's mistake, in what he thought proper to assert. I remember when I would have flown like a lapwing from house to house, from town to town, to justify *my own dear self's* character. But of late I have in some measure learned, one may be tolerably at ease, though

other people say more than they ought. And if conscience is on my side — if the matter affirmed is not true — I sit quiet, and do not think myself bound to make everybody as wise as myself.

We are pretty well, and join in love to you and Mrs. Bull and Tommy. Adieu, love us and pray for us.

I am, yours affectionately,

John Newton

Charles Square, 12th August, 1780.

My dear friend,

If you will neither come nor write, you must please yourself, for I am sure you will not please me. Now that you are grown into a great letter writer, I must be shut out of your correspondence I suppose. Perhaps your spirits are sunk into your shoes again, and you think you are not able to write. Try, however, as soon as possible, for I want to hear about you. If not, this is the last threepence you will have to pay for letters from me for a good while to come.

Watchman, what of the night? I think it a long one, and I cannot yet see a streak of dawn. All parties are contriving to prolong a war which they are all weary of. Some attempt is on foot towards peace — but I fear it will not succeed. Sin prevails, and requires a scourge, and therefore war continues, though the voice of personal interest no less than humanity, calls loudly for peace. When either we or our opponents seem to droop, some unexpected advantage revives hope again. When either they or we presume to boast, as though success were almost within reach, some disaster comes to damp the vain

confidence, and to show that the battle is the Lord's. These changing events insensibly draw on both sides farther and farther into mischiefs, and make them more and more heedless of consequences. In the meanwhile, an increase of *stupidity* and *hardness* at home, keeps pace with the increase of *danger* from abroad. And though it is now evident to all here that London was within a few hours of being reduced to ashes, and its preservation was little less than miraculous; that alarming crisis is now almost forgotten, not only by profane but by professor — and things go on much as they might do if there was no war, no danger, or if we had no signal mercies or deliverances to record. I must include myself in this censure.

The mischiefs and abominations attendant on a general election will now be superadded to our habitual course of national sin. Oh, what a train of riot, debauchery, and perjury, is upon the march to overspread the land! What an idea must an American savage form of *Christians* and *Christianity* — if he were to visit us at such a time as this!

Well, we must sojourn a time in this *Vanity Fair* — but, blessed be God, it is not our home. We are traveling to another *country*, and are taught another *language*, which the people of the fair do not understand. They stare at us as outlandish people, and are displeased because we will not adopt their maxims and customs. They are highly affronted if we presume to *pity* them. And much the same sort of treatment we might expect if we ventured to pity some people in *Bedlam*, and to say to their faces, *Alas; poor men — you are mad!* No, though he mistakes his *cell* for a palace, his *chains* and *straw* for ensigns of royalty — he would insist that he is in his sober senses, that you are the mad person, and for your pity he returns you pity mixed with scorn! Of course, we are glad to get away from such

unreasonable people, and all they can say does but the more confirm us, that they are insane

To be shut up with the *mad folks in Bedlam* would be a great trial — how is it we are no more affected with our situation in this great Bedlam, the world? There is hardly an instance of insanity within those dreary walls, which we may not find parallels to among our acquaintance who are permitted to walk at large. Their imaginations are so disordered, that they call evil good, and good evil; they are fond of their enemies, and startle at the sight of a true friend. They boast of liberty — while they are tied and bound with the chain of sin. They delight in mischief, scattering firebrands and arrows, and say, *Am not I in sport?* Some are groaning under the weight of a straw; and others in rapturous admiration, viewing *bubbles* which successively disappear as fast as they can blow them up. Oh, it is a mad world indeed! The Lord quicken our longings for that land where all are in their right minds — and where we, likewise, shall be quite in our senses. For, indeed, the *insanity* around us is epidemic, and there are few of the soberest but give proof enough they are not quite free from the general infection.

We both unite and send our love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, with one heart. I hope you continue to pray for us. The Lord keeps me alive. I wish I could say *lively*. But it is a miracle I am no worse, considering the hurry in which I live. The little leisure I have for retirement indisposes me for the improvement of that little.

Affectionately yours,

John Newton

Charles Square, 8 Sept. 1780.

My dear friend,

Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects! As I hope the fever has by this time left you — I congratulate you on its coming, because I take it for granted, that it brought a blessing with it, and will leave a blessing behind it. I am glad, however, that the information of your being better came at the same time with the news of your having been ill; for though my judgment is well satisfied that the Lord does all things well — yet I am capable of feeling no small anxiety when those whom I love are in jeopardy and affliction. May the Great Physician give a blessing to every means, give you health and ease, and reveal to you the abundance of peace and truth.

I hope this fever will not retard, much less prevent, the pleasure we propose in receiving you under our peaceable roof. What a mercy to have a peaceable roof to rest under! Preserved in *outward* peace by the kind, protecting, providential arm of the Lord, and favored with *internal* peace by the blessing of his good Spirit. This is our present mercy. He makes us of one mind in the house, he is about our bed and dwelling by night, and about our path by day. I am wonderfully favored with peace, likewise in the business of His house. I have as yet met with no incident to try either my faith or my patience as a minister — but all hitherto wears an encouraging aspect.

Whatever the parishioners, or any of them, think, they give me no disturbance. I could wish, indeed, that I had more access to them, and that more came to hear. I was invited to dine with one of them yesterday. It was the first invitation I had received from any who were not professedly serious. They behaved well. I behaved poorly, for I could not at the first meeting introduce the best subject. This is

often a hindrance to me; but the Lord can give me farther opportunity, and put a word in my mouth some time.

Ah! it is a shame to seem so *earnest* and pressing in the pulpit — and then to be so cold and mealy-mouthed at table! But I have not the talent of happily introducing the most profitable topics where I am a stranger. Often when I am in company — if what I have said were written down and brought to me afterwards — how should I — at least, how ought I — to blush, if I were constrained to read it!

Our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy; bring him with you, by all means. The Lord bless and keep you all.

I am your affectionate friend,

John Newton

25 Sept. 1780.

My dear friend,

Two letters for one — how kind! I thank you. I would send you one every week if I had time. This you know, and therefore accept the *will* for the *deed*.

I have not yet fixed on my *texts* for Christmas day. The two candidates which at present seem disposed to offer, are Genesis 49:10-12, for the morning, and John 9:39, for the evening. If they shall resolve to stand, and no powerful competitor interpose, it is probable they may both carry the election, especially the latter. I preached on it one Christmas evening, and have the notes by me. If the Lord pleases to give me new thoughts to fill up this old plan, and

breathe his good Spirit upon the whole, then I may bring forth things new and old to his praise.

"Jesus said, For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." John 9:39

Why did Christ come?

I. For judgment. Two senses of the word: purpose — or appointment; and manifestation — or trial, Luke 2:35. The gospel calculated to give sight to the blind, and to prove that they are stark blind who pretend to see without it, Luke 2:53, Matthew 11:25.

II. The blind see. The Spirit, by the gospel, makes the blind both see and feel their guilt and misery; then shows them pardon, life, and happiness in a Savior.

III. They who pretend they see — are made blind. These are of two sorts.

1. Such as absolutely reject the truth because it does not suit what they call their *reason*. Many of the most important doctrines, the more they are examined by fallen proud reason — will appear the more unreasonable. Instance in —

First, The Deity of Jesus, will be absurd to those who feel not the need of an Almighty Savior. So that 1 Corinthians 12:3.

Second — Justification by the righteousness of another will be thought absurd.

Third — That God, in point of acceptance, pays no more regard to men's best actions than their sins, is deemed another absurdity.

Fourth — Even to assert that he has a right to do what he will with his own, is accounted another hard and unreasonable point; though they claim such a right for themselves in their own concerns.

Thus the gospel reveals the thoughts of their hearts. Their boasted morality (if they have any) is found destitute of the love of God, and of truth. They profess to see — but are quite dark, yes, the light that shines around them increases their darkness.

2. Such as receive the gospel in the notion, and value themselves upon it — but are destitute of the power; none make a greater parade of *seeing* than these, none more fatally blinded. They smile at a self-righteousness founded upon works — but are themselves in the very spirit of the Pharisee. An *acknowledgment* of the doctrines which they misunderstand and abuse, serves them for a righteousness; and, trusting to this, they despise all who are stricter than themselves, and dislike close and faithful preaching as they would poison. A minister may preach in general terms, and have their good word; but, if he deals faithfully and plainly with conscience — if he bears testimony, not only against dead *works* — but against dead *faith*, they will think they do God service by censuring and reviling him. Awful case! to be blinded by the very truths they profess and believe. Yet I fear it is too common.

We are past the solstice, and shall soon perceive the peep, at least the forerunners of spring. Come, May! come, June! that we may trot down to Olney, Weston, Newport, Bedford. Ah, wretched creature I am! Will I dare to wish the time away? Rather wish every minute was an hour, while you have so much to do, and can so poorly improve the little space allotted to do it in. Well, I wish to wait patiently. May I improve the interval!

But though we shall be happy together, we are not necessary to each other, and that's a mercy. The Lord is sufficient. I wish to leave it with him, where, or what, or how — I am to be next June, or tomorrow. If he is mine — all is well; and if his will is done — all is right.

My dear wife is pretty well. The Lord seldom afflicts us all together — but in our turns we are taught to feel for and help each other. Mr. Barton is her doctor, under the great Physician, who, I hope, condescends to take her case in hand. He wounds — and he heals; he does both at the best time. Your cough, I hope, will be silenced and melted away before long, and you will join with all the spring birds in hymning the praises of the great Shepherd. Yes, let us love, and sing, and wonder, and go singing and wondering on through life, until we join the songs and admiration of the blessed before the throne.

Adieu, your very true friend,

John Newton

December 24th, 1780.

My dear friend,

These are horrid times indeed! Worse and worse, and I fear they will be worse still. But we know *who* is at the helm. What a mercy to know this! Reynolds says somewhere, "Jesus will either be your pilot in the ship, or your plank in the sea." This is good news, and therefore we need not fear for ourselves; for should we see a general shipwreck we shall survive it, and get safe to land. While we cleave to such a *plank* — we cannot sink.

But the *connection* and *union* is much nearer still. He is the Head — we the members. Now a man cannot drown while his *head* is above water. The members of Christ are in floods and depths; waves and billows roll over them — but the Head is on high, their life is hid and secure in him, and in good time the Lord will draw out the members after it.

If I were as I wish to be, I would not fear at all for myself. I would say, "My all is in the Lord's hands, and there I leave it. He undertakes to manage and care — and I have only to sit still and admire his wisdom."

But I would wish to be much affected for others. Oh, the distresses and calamities which sin occasions! Sin has excited, and it still continues, the war. Ah, what a devouring sword! how many fatherless and widows has it made! how many has it plunged into eternity! What fruitful fields are drenched with blood, and become wildernesses! Sin raised the late terrible hurricanes. What a desolation! Yet we (as a people) are stupid and insensible still, and his hand is stretched out still.

There is a *fast-day* coming. I shall preach two sermons, if the Lord pleases, and think to print one of them. I thought to have printed a *fast-day* sermon at Olney, and I have it by me written at length. With some refurbishing and alterations it will do for the present time; and I think my situation here rather requires and calls upon me for a public testimony.

Let us hear from you very soon. Tell Mrs. Bull and Tommy, that we send our love and our prayers that the grace of a gracious Savior may fill all our hearts, Amen.

John Newton

Jan. 20th, 1781.

My dear friend,

I do not envy you of your pleasure of reading one hundred and fifty pages of academics in Latin. It would have taken me a year, instead of a month, to wade through. I have lost my acumen for such 'learned disquisitions' — and perhaps I am as well without it.

How many hundreds, yes thousands, of pages have I read — of which there is now hardly any trace in my memory! I do not, however, account it all lost labor. Without doubt, many ideas which now occasionally offer themselves as my own — have been borrowed from others, though I have ungratefully forgotten the very names of my benefactors! But at my time of life, I wish to be like Mary — to sit at the feet of Jesus, and to make a transition from commentators — to that Great Teacher, who alone can influence the heart!

While I was writing — enter Dr. Barton. We never meet I believe — but we talk more or less of our *friend* at Newport. He tells me that he has prescribed something to good effect, and that your pains have retreated before his medicines. If it is for your good — I wish them never to return; but if the Lord makes them *messengers of grace and blessing* to you — I dare not shut the door against them, were I able.

I heard on Tuesday that the Bishop of Lichfield was to preach the sermon to the Society for Propagating the Gospel. Yesterday I purposed to be there — but when the hour came, I forgot it. Ah, such a head! The town rings of his sermon. Many dissenters I am told were there. He charmed away their prejudices, and sent them home full of commendations. His text was Hebrews 13:8. His sermon upon

it admirable for sense, composition, and elocution, and the whole strain evangelical. I hear it is to be *printed*. His point was, as I am informed, to show that Jesus Christ is in all ages — today, yesterday, and forever, the same. He displayed Jesus in his personal glories, in his work of redemption, in his government and law. What a foolish head was mine to forget the appointment!

I am glad my book of letters, *Cardiphonia* is at hand, to put you often in mind of me. You see me there in my best — and in my worst. Or, rather, you see what I *am* — and you may guess what I *would* be. It seems likely to sell and spread, which I shall be glad of, if the Lord is pleased to accompany them with his blessing. If my letters are owned to comfort the afflicted, to quicken the careless, to confirm the wavering — I will rejoice. I prefer being useful to one soul — to the applause of twenty nations and ages. The hour is coming when the united commendation of all mankind will be of no more value than the playful words of a few dirty boys in the street. I would, if possible, set no more value upon it now — than I shall then; but there is much *tinder* in my heart; and vile, ignorant, and insufficient as I know myself to be, I can but just manage the compliments that have been hinted in my hearing. How foolish, as well as wicked, is this self-delight!

If a man commended a coin which I called mine — it would not work much upon my pride, for I neither coined it, nor made the die; and if I am enabled either to write or to speak to the purpose, neither I, nor the sin which dwells in me, have any right to praise.

Company prevented finishing my letter before dinner, and now that I have dined — I am stupid, and half asleep; which you would soon perceive, without my telling you, if I do not hasten to subscribe myself,

Your affectionate

John Newton

Feb. 17, 1781.

My dear friend,

Your letter has been with me about two weeks, and must be answered, let who will, wait. You threaten me and frighten me with your suspicions; though, when you apprehend that the glow of my friendship turns pale and languid, from a just consciousness of my own feelings, I attribute it rather to the illness in you, than to any change in myself, in hope to convince you, in defiance of all your surmises, that I love you dearly. I know your make, and therefore forgive you. For your other apprehensions and admonitions, I trust my heart thanks you.

My situation here in London is *ensnaring*, indeed. There is a littleness, a weakness, a wickedness in my mind — which makes me liable to be carried away like a dead fish down the stream, by the things you mention. If I am kept holy — it is surely by that Power which can preserve a *spark* alive in a tempest, or in the ocean. But, to the praise of His grace, I am not conscious of my spirit being greatly hurt hitherto.

Though the *slavery* I was reduced to in *Africa* made no profitable impression upon my mind at the time — I hope the Lord has made the recollection of it useful to me since; and I may praise him that it is seldom, if ever, one whole day out of my thoughts. It occurs to me almost hourly, that the *rector*, the *author*, the *hymn-maker*, who is

admitted to the notice of 'my lord this', and 'my lady that' — was redeemed from abject slavery — the lowest state of human wretchedness. If it is hinted to me that I have written or said something pretty or pertinent on pious subjects, I am reminded that the hand which wrote it, and the mouth which spoke it, were once employed by Satan — that I was a most horrid blasphemer of the Savior, whom I now commend.

Nor is this all. The whole of my experience, since I began to know the Lord, has been graciously suited to keep me from forgetting myself altogether. Ah, what a series of inconsistency and perverseness am I conscious of! Can I be proud of pointing out rules to others — which I so sadly deviate from myself? However, it is true, that notwithstanding all I have seen and known, and felt, and said, and done — such a heart as mine would soon be proud — if Almighty Power did not keep it down.

I have heard of a playwright who put copies of his comedy into the hands of four friends to revise. When he came to collect the copies afterwards, he found one scene struck out here and there by one, another by another, so that among them they had demolished the whole play.

The lot of my *Cardiphonia* seems the reverse of this. You speak favorably of all the letters — but think those to the *nobleman inferior* to the rest. A gentleman of some eminence for name, taste, and literature, at Bristol, writes me his approbation of the whole — but gives a peculiar *preference* to the nobleman's. Some of them, as you observed, are rather essays, because the subjects were given me, and I was desired to treat them something at large, and because such parts of those letters which had not a reference to the subject were excluded. There is, likewise, a sort of deference when a *little* man

writes to a *great* man, which will not admit quite so much familiarity as between people on a par. Yet some of them, I think, are as much epistles as any in the volumes. However, it matters not whether they are essays, dissertations, sermons, or letters — so that they may be useful. If you could tell me which letters the Lord is pleased to make most acceptable and serviceable to the readers, I would soon tell you which are the best letters in the volumes.

I allow that the address to Mr. ____ is vexatious to the curiosity of a reader. But you are sensible it would have been improper to print the names. Some of the people are unknown to you, and when that is the case, it seems indifferent whether they were written to John Nokes, or Thomas Styles; however, you shall have a key to the most. Some of them would not wish to be known, and I shall, therefore, leave them, as they are, to exercise your sagacity.

I have a fast-day sermon in the press, which you will see in good time. My dear wife is better and worse — at present tolerably well. Betsy and I are quite well. We all love you, and unite in love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. Believe me yours, not in a languid but in a glowing degree,

John Newton

5th March, 1781.

My dear friend,

I am pleased that you approve my *fast-day* sermon; but I ought to be sorry such a picture of the state of the nation, (or rather a *sketch*, for it is no more,) is so palpably true, that you cannot charge me with

over-exaggerating the features. I ought to be sorry, likewise, that I am so little affected myself with the subject. I am too little impressed either with the sight of abounding sin — or the apprehension of approaching judgment. I live in the midst of a polluted people, and I am, alas! a sharer in the general pollution; yet do I not lay either the one or the other sufficiently to heart!

A voice at length is heard from the East Indies. The Lord has begun to plead with us there, and I shall not wonder if the cries of the oppressed at length prevail, for an extirpation out of that quarter of the globe. To an eye of sense, a *cloud*, portending an awful storm, appears over us — but *faith* sees the hand that guides its motions, and relies on the promises by which wisdom and love have engaged to bring light out of the darkness. Let us believe, and we shall see the salvation of God.

There is a certain day, which, for reasons unknown to me, is the best and fittest in the whole year for me to go to visit you. But I am not almanac-maker sufficient to pick this day out from the rest, by my own skill. I know not whether it is in May, June, or September. But there is One who knows all things, who bids me trust to him, and he will direct my steps — not by an audible voice from heaven — but by the *movements of his providence*. Something shall still hinder and delay until the right time comes, and then all hindrances shall give way; and bolts and locks, though made of brass, shall fly open of their own accord, without any need of my contriving to pick them with false keys. There is a previous question, whether the Lord sees it proper I should go at all to Olney this year? *Mr. Self* eagerly says "Yes, I hope so." But *Mr. Self* can give no sufficient reason why he should not be mortified and disappointed, for he knows he deserves no better.

My love to Miss Myers, if still with you. May the Lord make and keep her peaceful, humble, spiritual, and give her large amends in grace and comfort for all that her profession has cost her.

I am glad to hear you continue tolerably well. I hope the barometer of your spirits is rather up than down, and that you will bestow a placid smile upon my letter when you read.

I have not yet seen Mr. Madan's pernicious book, nor am I eager for it. *It would have been better for some people if they had never learned to read or write!* Ah, what are talents — if not consecrated to the Lord's service, and under the influence of his Spirit! They are but like a *sword in the hands of a madman*, with which he indiscriminately wounds his enemies, his friends, and himself.

You pity me; I almost pity myself. I could like a little more leisure; but if I am where I *ought* to be — imagination could not place me better. Yesterday I wandered an hour in the most retired parts of Hyde Park, and I thought it pleasant. My dear wife's health is variable, like the weather — which is saying, she is not very ill, or long ill at a time. The Lord is good. Love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. Farewell. Pray for Hoxton.

John Newton

21st April, 1781.

My dear friend,

We would be glad to have you with us — but must be content with talking of you. I hope your *Best Friend* will be with us, and then we can make a good shift without this or the other particular person. I

suppose the apostle John was secluded from his friends when at Patmos, and I suppose he hardly missed them. *Creatures are candlelight comforts*: when they are put out, or burn out, the sun can well supply the place of them all. You are often upon my mind; or, to say it better, you are always in my heart. This is a truth which does not at all depend upon my coming or my not coming to Newport to see you.

The above was written on Thursday; it is now Saturday morning. We are returning home, and shall have the pleasure of Mrs. Wilberforce and Dr. Conyer's company to dinner. I meant to fill my paper — but the naughty pen will not write. I have had pleasant company, and some outwardly pleasant walks about the park and heath; but something has been lacking. My soul is too much like *Gideon's fleece* — dry; though I can perceive the dew falling around me.

We join our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and to Miss Myers, if still with you. As I shall hardly have time to write more today, I subscribe myself now most affectionately yours,

John Newton

Greenwich, 12th May, 1781.

Dear Sir,

When I returned on Saturday, Miss Myers called, and brought me a little strip of paper. She said she was feeling poorly; made but a short stay, and I have not seen her since. We were glad to hear that though you had been ill, you were then better.

I have reason to be thankful that *Cardiphonia* seems acceptable among the Lord's people. It has been much called for — but I hear nothing of a new edition being wanted yet. Most of the letters are so desultory, that it would be difficult to find a *title* to each which would comprise the whole subject; but more of this when we meet. I shall sit in silence, to hear any remarks you make, in hopes of profiting by them.

We hope to travel to *Bedford* on Monday. My thoughts run much upon the interview with my old friends — if the Lord preserves them and us with health and peace, and especially if he is pleased to meet us, and to cause our hearts to burn within us. Otherwise we shall only yawn, and trifle away our precious time. If a group of empty pots should meet together, with the charitable design of filling each other, they would all be disappointed; but place them by a fountain, or under a running pipe, there they might first receive, and then communicate. You will pray, therefore, for us — first, that we may have a safe and prosperous journey to you; and secondly, that we may not come in vain, or alone.

Company is come, and dinner is coming, so no more at present, (but love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy.)

From your affectionate friend, and so forth,

John Newton

May 26, 1781.

Dear friend,

If I had your leisure, and you had my inclination, we would exchange letters more frequently. You seem determined not to write first, and I am hardly able to write at all. But, if the Lord is with you, and you are pretty well, why should you puzzle yourself about folks that are fifty miles distant?

The Lord is very gracious to us. My dear wife is still favored with very tolerable health. Preaching six or seven times per week agrees wondrously well with me, in this hot weather. I eat heartily, sleep soundly, and I believe continue to grow fat. I am often favored with liberty in *public*, which sometimes amazes me — when I consider what I am conscious of in *private*.

My late visit to Bedford, Newport, and Olney, left a pleasant savor upon my mind; and the recollection of incidents which, by the Lord's blessing, may be profitable, remains upon my mind. I was glad to find and leave you so well, for you seemed to me better than at any time since I have known you. I hope you will continue mending, until you are as sound and hearty as an oak. I mean, if so much health may be good for you. But if illnesses, etc., are means by which the Lord designs good for your soul, then I must consent that you be afflicted. It is better to be sick or cast down, than to be proud or careless, or to do foolish things, to make the church weep, and the world laugh.

Public affairs look darker still, expectation is on tiptoe, waiting for hourly news from all parts abroad — but foreboding that the news whenever it comes, or from whatever quarter, will be distressing. I am afraid what we next hear from America will not be pleasing. That unhappy country is still likely to be a scene of desolation. In the West Indies, Tobago is gone, and perhaps by this time some other of our islands. And the cry of oppression in the East Indies seems at length to have awakened judgment there. I think of the words, "In those

days the Lord began to cut Israel short." He seems about to cut us short on all sides. Yet the spirit of our nation seems like the thoughtless mariner asleep on the top of the mast, heedless of the danger, which is increasing every day.

Yet still I hope there is mercy. The gospel spreads — grace reigns — the number of praying souls are upon the increase, and their prayers I trust will be heard. We are sure that the Lord reigns, that *the storm is guided by the hands which were nailed to the cross*, and that as he *loves* his own — he will take *care* of them. But they who have not an ark to hide themselves in, will probably weep and wail before the indignation is past.

Blessed be God for the prospect of an *eternal land of peace*, where sin and every sorrow will be excluded. There we shall have a day without cloud and without night. The sun shall go down no more, the voice of war shall be heard no more. The inhabitants shall feel pain no more, shall weep no more, shall go out no more. Then, no more *unsanctified* desires — and therefore no more *unsatisfied* desires. Oh what a state of love, life, and joy — when we see Jesus as he is! and by beholding, are changed into his image, and made (according to the utmost capacity of our natures) perfectly like him.

Well it *shall*, it will come, it approaches nearer every hour!

My love to Mrs. Bull, Tommy, Mr. Fordham, not forgetting Mr. Goode, when you see him.

I am your sincere friend and brother, servant, and fellow pilgrim, etc.,

John Newton

26th July, 1781.

My dear friend,

It is not for you and I who know that the Lord does all things, and believe that he does all things well — it is not for us to shake our heads and say, *Alas! alas! I wish it was otherwise*. I trust he has adjusted the time of your coming to London to answer important purposes, and then I ought to be well pleased, though my own humor and feelings are crossed by it. We thank you for your kind intention of spending some of your first days with us, and glad we shall be to have you "from morn until noon, from noon until dewy eve."

Give our hearty love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and tell Mrs. Bull that so sure as you come in our way, we will do all in our power to take care of you, and make you easy.

I am affectionately yours,

John Newton

September 1, 1781.

My dear friend,

Yes, dear Mrs. Barham is *gone home*. She lived honorably, and died peaceably. Were I to preach a funeral sermon, I would say but little about her; but I would make the people stare, if I could, by telling them what a wonderful *Friend* she had; one who paid all her debts, and who was so attentive to her, that his eye was never off her by

night or day for a long number of years; one who, by looking at her, could sweeten her pains, renew her strength, and fill her with wisdom, grace, and peace. It was to his praise, and not to hers, that she filled up every character and relation of life with propriety, endured pain with cheerfulness, and gave an edifying and memorable example to all around her. It was this kind *Friend* who first introduced me to her, and I was honored with her friendship because she believed I loved her Friend. Well, she is gone, and I am a loser; but I do not wish her back again. She is gone to see her best Friend; and I hope, one day, to see her with him. If she could speak to us now, she would say, "Be not slothful — but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises!"

I love to see and notice God's providential hand in every circumstance of domestic life. Trivial as they may seem singly, they are often of great importance to us in their consequences; and therefore He, in whose sight all the nations of the earth are but as the drop of a bucket, condescends to direct them.

We are insensibly slipping into the winter season. By-and-bye, we expect frost, snowstorms, and rain; short, lowering days, and long, gloomy nights. A few weeks or months of these inclement changes will prepare us (if we live) to value and welcome the return of spring, which will soon pass away to make room for summer, autumn, and then winter again. Thus things go round and round — but every season brings us a stage nearer to an *eternal year of perpetual spring* — a day without night, where our sun shall be clouded or go down no more. Happy prospect! We shall not always be as we are now. We are now at *school*, learning to sing the song of redeeming love, and, before long, we shall be translated to sing it before the throne of God!

Your poor friend,

John Newton

13 Oct. 1781.

Dear Sir,

I am not surprised that a little of the gloom of November should tinge your spirits; but I hope as the weather is bright again, your barometer will stand higher when you read my letter than when you wrote your own. However that be, I shall venture to address you with the Angel's salutation, "Hail, you that are highly favored! The Lord is with you." You live in a strong city, which has salvation itself for walls and bulwarks; your frequent changes are numbering off apace, and the last when it comes (I hope a good round number of years hence) will introduce you to a state of unchangeable and endless peace and joy! With such a home in view, the trials we may meet upon the road are of no great comparative importance. Let us not be weary in doing or suffering the Lord's will, for in due season we shall reap.

I have printed, very privately, a letter to my parishioners, and sent one under cover and seal to every housekeeper. I would have sent you one, if I had a frank. The next time you ride to Mr. Cowper's, you may see it. With our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy,

I remain most sincerely yours,

John Newton

Nov., 1761.

My dear Mr. Bull,

If I was strictly to do nothing by partiality, I would not answer your letters within six months, having some, and from people whom I love, lying by me, of a still longer date than that. But if I have a strong predilection in your favor, I cannot help it, and I hope it is not sinful to indulge it, so as to take you out of course.

The great *State Ship* seems to be getting apace into shoal water, and I fear will be aground soon. Things go on from bad to worse; and repentance seems as little thought of as ever. But though she should, (like Paul's ship), be broken all to pieces, the Lord's people on board her shall get safe to the heavenly shore. We need not, we ought not, to fear for ourselves; but who can help being affected with the case of the many, who have no ears to hear the Lord's voice, no eye to see his hand, in the awful calamities our sins have brought upon us! May I not rather say, Who is sufficiently affected? I am sure I am not.

Trade is much at a stand-still — bankruptcies increase — the distresses of the poor are likely to be great, especially if the new year should bring us, (as I expect,) a hard frost.

Oh, what a mischievous thing is sin! how does it fill the world with a variety of woe! But our Lord says to his people, *Do not let your hearts be troubled*. He will take care of us while here, and by and by we shall be removed to a better soil and a better climate, where we shall never be disturbed by the din of war.

The Lord reigns! He governs the world, and let men contrive and plot as they will, they are all *instruments* in his hand, and shall in the end bring nothing to pass — but what is worthy of his wisdom and

goodness to appoint or permit. Even the wrath of men shall praise him. And what man in his wrath or ambition would do if he could, if it be not a part of the Lord's wise plan — shall fail and evaporate. Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and other boasters, who expected to carry everything before them according to their own wills — had their bounds and commissions, beyond which they could not pass. When they attempted it, they quickly found a hook and bridle in their jaws, and were stopped, turned, and confounded.

It is just so in modern times: when mortals speak proudly, the Lord is above them. He takes the wise in their own craftiness. He blows upon their schemes, and they break like a bubble upon the waters. Let us rejoice that this God, who pours contempt upon princes, is our God. Whatever storms and floods arise, we are in the ark — which is under the protection and the pilotage of Him that loved us, and gave himself for us.

My dear wife is sometimes poorly — but, upon the whole, pretty well; we live in peace, and do tolerably well. Our little girl and myself are favored with good strong health. We all send our love to you, love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. I hope you pray often, and earnestly, for us. You are seldom long out of my mind. In particular, it is usual with me to pay you a mental visit on a Saturday evening, when I suppose you are thinking about the business of the morrow.

My texts on Christmas-day were Hebrews 2:14, 15; and in the evening, John 9:39. I shall need two sermons for New-year's day — but am not yet provided. The hour of prayer and supper is just at hand (nine o'clock), and therefore I must bid you a good night. The Lord bless you,,

John Newton

28th Dec. 1781.

My dear Sir,

I found your letter last night after I came home, thank you for it.

This was my text on New Year's day, "Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone." Psalm 71:9

I am drawing nearer and nearer to the season which David either expected or felt. I observe that the aged believer has no additional claim upon the Lord, who might have rejected him when he first came, and now at last might justly cast him off, as to any plea he can offer for himself; for his services have been all defective or defiled, and he must confess himself unprofitable and unfaithful. But his plea, in the name of Jesus, is strong and sure.

Many reasons teach the aged believer the need of this prayer. As his graces are still imperfect, so his powers are feelingly upon the decline. It was but little he could do, at his best — and now less and less.

He feels other props and comforts dropping off apace. When he was young he had warm spirits and pleasing prospects; but now what a change of the friends in which he once delighted! In some he has found inconstancy — they have forsaken and forgotten him; and others have been successively taken away by death. They have fallen like the leaves in autumn — and now he stands almost a naked trunk. If any yet remain, he is expecting to lose them likewise, except he himself is taken from them.

Old age abates, and gradually destroys, the relish of such earthly comforts as might be otherwise enjoyed. Pains, infirmities, loss of sleep and appetite, the failure of sight, hearing, and all the senses — are harbingers, like Job's messengers, arriving in close succession to tell him that death is upon his progress, and not far distant!

If youth has no security against death — then old age has no possibility of escaping the grim monster. But though friends fail, cisterns burst, gourds wither, strength declines, and death advances — if God does not forsake me — then all is well. "Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone." Psalm 71:9

This subject does not directly suit you at present; but if you live long enough, you will be old in time, and therefore I sent you a little sketch of my sermon.

I wish poor old England had a heart suited to this prayer. The nation has had a time of manhood, strength, and bloom. But it is now gray-headed, weak, and doting; and, alas! its grey hairs are not found in the ways of righteousness. Yet I have a good hope the Lord will not utterly cast off this sinful nation, so as to abandon it to the will of his enemies. He has a remnant, and a work among us, and I hope the word is, 'Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.' We must be brought down, impoverished, and put to shame. His glory requires it; and if we love his name, we must not be greatly sorry for those dispensations which are necessary to convince the nation and the world that the Lord is God. The bulk of a people called Christian, do not know that the Lord is God; but it is a truth they must learn, whatever the acquisition may cost.

I wish I could feel as I ought — for myself — for the churches — for the nation. I do not wonder that our plans have been wrong, and all

our expectations defeated. But SIN is the cause. If we had not provoked the Lord, he would have presided in our councils; and so far as war had been necessary and right, he would have given our commanders wisdom, union, fidelity, and success. Still it shall be well with those who sigh and mourn before him, and whose eyes affect their hearts.

May the Lord make this new year a good and happy one to you and Mrs. Bull and Tommy. We join in love.

I am sincerely yours,

John Newton

3 Jan 1782.

My dear Gentle Bull,

I Hope Tommy has lost his fever, and Mrs. Bull continues well. Love to both from both your poor friends here. Peggy was so well as to visit us on Saturday; but when I returned her visit on Monday, she was very doing poorly again.

All the illnesses in the city Hospital are but feeble types of the various symptoms of that worst of diseases, sin. The best earthly physicians are still men — feeble emblems of Him who heals soul and body with a *word*. His name is Jesus. He comes to the poor — as readily as to the rich; he takes no fees; and no case ever miscarried in his hand. To him I commend you, and all your soul illnesses.

I am your most affectionate

John Newton

January 24, 1782.

My dear Sir,

They say the *chameleon* assumes a variety of colors, according to the color of different objects near him. Thus changeable are my feelings often when I am reading your letters. One paragraph makes me look bright, for you are pretty well, and in good spirits. Perhaps the very next is almost filled with the words pain, weakness, dejection, and the like; then my heart puts on a sable hue, and assimilates itself to your complaints. But, perhaps, before the letter closes, your complaints are forgotten, your spirits revive, and mine likewise, of course. Upon the whole, cheerfulness predominates with me, because I consider your comforts as real and abiding, and your complaints as rather imaginary and transitory.

We were glad to hear that you and *Sir Thomas* had a safe and good journey home, and that Mrs. Bull was in less pain than when you left her. My wishes for her are,

1st, that her affliction may be sanctified; and then,

2nd, that, if the Lord pleases, it may be relieved and removed.

He is the best *physician*; he can make the lame walk, and heal a wound, whether it be in the leg or in the heart; yes, he wounds only to heal, and afflicts us that he may thereby take occasion to comfort us. I trust she feels herself safe in his merciful hands, and believes that he will surely do her good. If we suffer, it shall neither be in vain, nor for a long time. Yet in a little while, and he will change these vile

bodies, and fashion them according to the pattern of his own glorious body. What a thought is that! Could we have dared to hope for so much, if he had not promised it? No; it would have been presumption; but, now God has promised it, it were presumption to question his word.

It seemed high time for me to write — and yet I find nothing at hand to fill up the paper. Shall I touch upon politics? We have revolutions and changes — but the newspapers (my chief sources of intelligence) have told you all the Lord is doing, and will do something worthy of himself; this we may be sure of. As to the particulars, we must await the openings of his Providence; and, since we already know that the *sum total* will be — all is right, we may wait with patience and confidence. At present, we seem to have some distant prospect, at least, of peace; a blessing which appears to me of such great importance, that I am not very solicitous as to the terms by which it may be attained. It seems, the *outs* are now to be the *ins*, and the *ins* the *outs*; and I suppose a new *party* will be attended with a new opposition; for these things, among us, seem to be as much of course, as that a shadow should be inseparable from the body.

In the meantime, my part, as a Christian, is to be quietly subject to "the powers that be;" for they are all (whether they intend it or not) busy in accomplishing the will of my Lord. In the *great ship of the nation*, I am only a passenger; the mariners will never consult me about the course they should steer, nor regard my advice if I should give it them unasked. If I have any office on board, it is, at most — but that of a chaplain, who, though he has no hand in the navigation, is doubtless engaged, by both character and interest, to pray for a good voyage; and that He, who has the wind and weather at his disposal, may, in mercy, bring the poor tempest-tossed vessel safely through the storm.

"Certainly, man walks about like a mere shadow. Indeed, they frantically rush around in vain, gathering possessions without knowing who will get them!" Psalm 39:6

What a bustle are most men in, about the momentary concerns of the present life! They are like children playing blind-man's bluff! And while the blindfold hinders them from seeing that they are upon the edge of a precipice, in the midst of their eager play — they slip, they fall in succession one after the other — and they are inevitably, irrevocably gone!

But others crowd in to fill up their vacancies — and the game still goes on!

With what a mixture of compassion and indignation, may we conceive the holy angels have, as they behold what is transacting upon the earth!

Forever adored, be the gracious Savior, who took the blindfold from our eyes, withdrew us from the dangerous brink — to sit in peace and safety at his feet. "For He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness — and transferred us into the Kingdom of His dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins!" Colossians 1:13-14. "Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who do not believe!" 2 Corinthians 4:4

Now, if we are wise to know our privilege, all the commotions around us need not affect us any more (as to our own personal concernments) than the rattling of the storm against the wall, when we are sitting snug within doors by the fire-side. Yet it befits us to pity those who are found in the street exposed without shelter to the fury of the tempest.

Love from us both to Mrs. Bull and Mr. Tommy. Continue to pray for us, and may the Lord bless you and yours.

I am your affectionate friend,

John Newton

23rd March, 1782.

My dear friend,

Thanks for your letter, and I will thank the Lord for putting out the St. Anthony's fire, for relieving Mrs. Bull, and for removing Tommy's fever. He is a tender plant; I can conceive something of your feelings when he is threatened. I hope he will be spared for your comfort, and am sure he will if it be upon the whole best; if otherwise, I doubt not but He who has supported you under former trials, would still give you proofs of his all-sufficiency, and enable you to acquiesce in the appointments of his wisdom.

Mr. Clayton lately called upon me, to tell me, that many people are seriously thinking of establishing a new academy for preparing young men for the ministry — in which the *greatest* stress might be laid upon truth, life, spirituality; and the *least* stress possible upon modes, forms, and non-essentials — that it must be at a moderate distance from London — that, in fact, Newport was the place fixed upon, for the sake of one Mr. Bull, who lives there, and who it was hoped would accept the superintendency. He said some talked of a much larger sum — but that he himself made no doubt but so far as 500 pounds per annum would be readily subscribed to promote so good a design.

He then said it was his request, and the desire of many of his friends, that I would draw up a plan for the forming such an academy, and likewise that I would write to you upon the subject.

The design met my hearty approbation, as it stood connected with Mr. Bull, who I said appeared to me the most proper person I could think of, to undertake it. As to my drawing up a plan, I half promised to write my thoughts of it — that is, I mean to tell Mr. Clayton, by letter, how I would sketch out such an institution, if I lived in *Utopia*, and could have the management of things my own way. If they can pick any hints worthy of notice from such an attempt, they shall be welcome to them; but to draw a formal plan how an academy should be regulated in this enlightened age and country, and to hit such a medium as might unite and coalesce the respectable Dissenters and Methodists, who seem willing to promote this academy, might savor too much of presumption in one who was never either at university or academy himself — but rather spent the time which other young men employ in study, in the *wilds of Africa!*

However, feeling myself rather awkward as to the service assigned me, I told Mr. Clayton I would wish to hear from you first, expecting that a sketch from you would, in a measure, illuminate me, and qualify me for the undertaking.

I wish, therefore, to know something of your mind and views, and the sooner the better. It is a service I have long wished to see you more fully engaged in, and am not willing to see that time which might be better employed, taken up in the instruction of young Christian pastors.

There is much thirst for the gospel in Lancashire: people willing to hear, and actually more congregations formed than preachers can be procured for. A Mr. Gardiner, from Lancaster, has been long in town.

He seems a lively, understanding man. A part of his business is to procure preachers, if he can; but the situation is so distant, and the service not over pleasing to flesh and blood. Grace, humility, zeal, self-denial, and extempore speaking — are requisites. He says there are now two congregations, in particular, that afford a good prospect: in the one — if the minister can live upon 100 pounds per year; in the other — if he can live by faith in the promises. He desired me to ask if your Mr. Fordham is ready to take the field; if he would like such a service; if you think it would suit him, etc. I must just add, Love, love, love, and wish you all a good night.

I am always and very much your

John Newton

11th April, 1782.

Monsieur, dear friend,

My little portion of retired time is so much engrossed by the *academy* business, that I can hardly afford ten minutes to write a line by Mrs. Wilberforce. Yet I would wish you to know that I am not unmindful of you. My work grows upon my hands, and is likely to be a volume; and, after all, not what Mr. Clayton asked for — an academy for England — but for Utopia. But if the Lord enables me to drop some hints that may be useful to the design, I shall be thankful. Some people may perhaps think it a satire upon present academies — but this was not my intention. I think one more writing forenoon may bring me to a conclusion; but then I must transcribe it. For though my first thoughts are usually my best, in the main — yet it is so carelessly and badly written, with so many mistakes, so many

words interlined, and scratched out, and put one for another — that few people but myself can cleverly decipher it! I will go on, with my best speed: indeed, I must, for I cannot comfortably attend to anything else until it is finished.

I know that we love you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and that I must hasten to subscribe myself,

Yours, affectionately,

John Newton

2nd May, 1782.

My dear friend,

I finished the task Mr. Clayton assigned to me about ten days ago, and put it into his hands. I understand it has passed from him, and is passing into other hands. Your curiosity to see it, I am told, is upon tip-toe; but it must wait awhile. I suppose it will not return to me for some time.

I have had the pleasure of pleasing my employer, at least; and perhaps a few of every party may like it; but I expect many of all the parties concerned, will not much admire my plan. I have given my sentiments undisguised and at large, without much caring who is pleased or displeased; for as I live in *Utopia*, it is of no importance to me what the people who live at such a distance as London are pleased to think of me.

The most flattering sentiment I form of my performance is, that though I have filled seven sheets of post paper with very close

writing, I have a good hope there will hardly be found a single period which will meet with your disapprobation. Your good opinion is of more consequence to me than that of others, because you are a nearer neighbor to me; for you live, or at least frequently reside, in Utopia as well as myself. Though you and I are both originals in our way — we have our separate and distinct peculiarities, and, consequently, cannot be exactly alike. Yet it appears to me, that I have the honor to think more with you, upon the whole circle of our professional subjects, than with any minister I know; and accordingly, I expect that you will approve in a manner of the whole and every part of my plan; whereas I can hardly think of any other friend of mine who may not find something to object to here and there. But if I should be disappointed in this my optimistic expectation, and have not come so near your views as I think, you must let me down as softly as you can, for fear the mortification should hurt me, and I should feel too much when constrained to say, Ah my misery!

The scene of my play is laid in *Utopia*; the acts, or heads, are four:

I. The **situation**, why not too near the metropolis, nor too far from it — but about a moderate day's journey of fifty or so miles.

II. The choice of the **tutor**. I will not tell you that it is your picture drawn from the life. It is sufficient if I have hit off a general idea of what you wish to be.

III. The choice of **pupils**. Why they must be serious, capable, and having desires already towards the ministry upon just and solid grounds.

IV. Their **studies** and line of conduct. What they are to learn and do; and what they are not to learn nor do. If this part should be thought a

satire upon some academies, I can honestly say I did not intend it as such. I do not mean to meddle with anybody's affairs but my own, I set out with a simple desire of tracing the clue of truth wherever it might lead me.

It is an important subject, and I care not who knows my opinion of it, as I seemed providentially called to it. That a Dissenting minister should be sent by Dissenters to me for a plan of an academy seemed so extraordinary, that after a few fears lest my shoulders should be too weak for the burden, I complied with readiness, almost as if Gabriel had been sent to set me to work.

Tell Mrs. Bull and Tommy that we love them. My dear wife is at present but poorly. Miss Newton, as we sometimes call her, and her Papa are, through mercy, in full health.

Praise the Lord for his goodness to us, and pray him to sanctify our comparatively light crosses.

Believe me always and affectionately yours,

John Newton

25th May, 1782.

My dear friend,

I set about the task Mr. Clayton gave me with good spirits, from a persuasion that though you and I might possibly differ about some *subordinate* parts of my plan, I would in some good degree meet your idea upon the whole, otherwise I would not have attempted it. I am glad of your approbation, because I hoped for it, and aimed at it.

I believe as you say, that I think more nearly with you on the subject, than with any other person I am acquainted with.

Mr. Clayton and Mr. John Wilson my neighbor are now both out of town. The latter is expected home tomorrow. I understand the present tutors of the Evangelical Academy have proposed to resign their charge, and I believe some of the supporters of that institution thought of you as the properest person to undertake it. But my plan will not suit with their design, which seems to be chiefly to give a little assistance to people who have already begun to preach. But Mr. Wilson told me, that he did not doubt but there were people enough, both willing and able, to carry my scheme into execution; that is, to give a number of promising young men a regular education, and that there was not a doubt but you were the proper person to engage in it.

Here the matter must rest at present, until his return, and for a few weeks afterwards. If it should proceed, it will be perhaps desirable to print a few copies of the *Utopian plan*, not for publication — but to distribute among friends, as it would take a long time to circulate a single manuscript. If it should be printed, you will of course have a copy among the first. If not, I will endeavor to send it you again, that you may get it transcribed, if you think it worth while. I have done my part, and you have done yours, by signifying your willingness to listen to the proposal, if it should be made to you. The rest is in the Lord's hands; if it is agreeable to his will, and a service which he will deign to smile upon, he will bring it forward. If not, we are but where we were, and I trust we do not wish to see anything brought forward — but under his auspices and influence.

This will seem an awkward business all round to some people. What apology can Mr. Clayton make to many Dissenters for applying to a clergyman for a plan of an academy? And what can the poor cleric

say to some people in his line, for chalking out the plan of a dissenting methodist academy? How will the staunch Tabernacle folks like my *innuendos* against some of their popular, loud, powerful preachers? I think *this poor speckled bird* will be pecked at by fowls of every wing. But it is well, that though he does not wish to offend any of them, he is mighty indifferent as to their censures. If we act with a single eye, and are desirous to serve and please the Lord — we may be easy as to consequences. When the conscience is clear and the heart simple — neither the applauses nor the anathemas of *worms* are worth two-pence per bushel.

Your letter is a curiosity in its kind, for you have not found room for a single line respecting either health or sickness. From which I am willing to infer, that you were not very ill, or in very great pain, when you wrote it; or you would not have omitted a subject so familiar to your pen. I was indisposed a few days — but not confined or stopped in my public work.

I have some reason to think of the apostle's words, "As poor — yet making many (at least some) rich." I seem to preach with liberty, and to be heard with acceptance and profit by the congregation. I cannot but hope the Lord enriches some of my hearers by my ministry — but, at the same time, it is certain I feel very poor to myself. If they are feasted — it is otherwise with me. Through mercy I have just bread enough to keep me alive — and this is more than I deserve.

In the pulpit, and while the eyes of my fellow-creatures are upon me — I seem to be in earnest, and talk big! Perhaps some who hear me think, 'You lead a happy life!' But if they knew how and what I am at home — they would pity me. Ah, what a poor cold, confused, inconsistent creature! I am a poor servant, indeed! and my only

comfort springs from thinking (which yet I do too seldom and faintly) what a wondrous Master I serve.

We join in hearty love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. I trust you believe me to be your very affectionate friend and servant,

John Newton

20th June.

My dear friend,

Mr. John Wilson is now returned. He is my intimate friend, warmly disposed to forward our *Utopian plan*, and for his character, connections, his ability, and generosity — he is a proper person to move in it. Thus far we have made a good beginning. He is the only one with whom I have talked about it, except Mr. Clayton, who will not be at home until the end of next week. In the mean while, Mr. Wilson wishes the plan may be printed just as it is, not published; and I mean soon to send it to the press, and take off two hundred and fifty copies, to be distributed among those who may be expected will promote the design.

The only preliminary we have as yet settled, and which is the sine qua non of the whole business, is that Mr. Bull is to be the tutor.

But Mr. Wilson thinks we had better form the actual plan, before the affair is publicly talked of. He says, if otherwise, a number of people are called together to consult about it, each one will probably have some proposal or nostrum of his own; the aggregate of which may diverge so far from the original scheme as to overturn it, and render it unworthy either of your acceptance, or of our endeavor to promote

it; whereas, if the plan is previously fixed, in such a manner that no just objections can lie against it — it may go down the more glibly, and save abundance of labor.

The good opinion we have of you, makes us desirous that you should be under as little control as possible. The whole management will be left to yourself: yet this power must be delegated to you by some proper authority; and those who support you in it, will have a right to know how it is exercised, and likewise to be occasionally consulted.

A principal difficulty that occurs to us, is concerning the *admission of students*. We would not have any forced upon you, or to continue with you — if you find that their temper, conduct, or lack of capacity or industry, should render them improper people. On the other hand, if the negative or the exclusion should rest wholly upon you, it will put you in an invidious situation. Those who are excluded will, of course, think themselves injured; and it is probable the fathers, mothers, brothers, and cousins, and so on, of such aggrieved people will rise up against you, as an austere and unreasonable man. We must have your thoughts upon the best method or medium for obviating this difficulty.

My plan, you will observe, proposes a certain annual stipend for the tutor, whether the pupils be more or fewer, with a reasonable allowance for the board of each beside. It takes for granted, that the laborer is worthy of his hire, on the one hand; and, on the other, that the tutor, for the sake of serving the Lord, and training up a number of youths for the ministry, who are to be supported by subscription — that is, by charity — will, by the proposals he makes, show an unselfishness worthy of the cause he serves, and of the character he bears in Utopia. You might probably make more money from half the number of students, if you confined yourself to the sons of gentlemen

who can afford to pay handsomely. On this point, I must get you to speak for yourself, and propose your own terms — as I believe your friends would rather you should mention what you think right, than undertake to judge for you.

I request you, therefore, according to the hints which I have dropped, to take a good pen, good black ink, then light your pipe, and write me such a letter, expressive of your views and wishes, as will be proper for me to show to any people whom it may concern. After all, both you and I may have our labor for our pains; but this I know, that if the thing is of the Lord — it shall prosper. Some great affairs have grown from as small beginnings; and, at the worst, whether He is pleased to bring this about or not, when we mean simply and humbly to serve him, he will graciously accept of the intention.

I saw Mr. Monk at church today, and invited him to come to see me. There is, it seems, an honesty about him which I like. Poor, wise, foolish, evangelical, self-righteous people of Olney! Too many there seem more solicitous that the minister should preach the gospel, than to profit by the gospel themselves.

Our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy.

I am much and always yours,

John Newton

3rd July, 1782.

I showed Mr. Wilson this letter. He approves all but what I say of him. He thinks you will overrate his consequence. His personal goodwill and service you may depend upon — but he says his influence is not worth mentioning.

Dear Sir,

I believe something will come of our Utopian plan, that a proposal will be made to you, such as I judge, from your letters, you will not refuse. But, as yet, things are in embryo, and not sufficiently ripe for particularizing. I was lately sent for unexpectedly by some gentlemen, with whom I had not exchanged a word upon the subject, excepting with Mr. Clayton, who was present; but the invitation did not come from him (he is but just returned from Scotland). There will be a second meeting in less than a two weeks, when I may perhaps be able to tell you more.

It seems generally agreed upon, that you are to be the man. As to Newport, the only objection (which yet may be overruled) is to the distance. Some think a subscription will languish — if the academy is so far off, and especially that no committee will undertake to travel so far. For these reasons a situation within twenty miles of London would be preferable. I expect the question will be asked, "Can Mr. Bull be prevailed on to relocate to some place within these limits?" If you would put an answer into my mouth, you must write in the course of the week. You will ask the Lord, and he will tell you what to say. It should seem you could hardly go to a place where your ministry would be less regarded than where you are. But notwithstanding this, you will not go without his permission. If it is his will — he will prepare both your mind and your way.

You know the Lord does all things right, and not a hair of his children's heads, falls to the ground without him. You know he can bring light out of darkness, and has wise reasons for all that he does, and for all he permits to be done. Dwell a minute upon these thoughts before you read further.

Now you are prepared, I proceed to tell you, that a friend of yours and mine was grievously hurt by an ox on Monday last. Mr. Sharp and two other surgeons attend him. They tell me there are no symptoms at present to forbid the hopes of a recovery, though they have not been without fear of a fracture in his skull. But from present favorable appearances, they hope it is not so. Our friend lives not far from Barbican, and his name is Barton.

I am with him every day. He is perfectly sensible, and spoke yesterday very comfortably. I shall see him again by and by. Mrs. Barton is very composed and comfortable.

A single ox, you see, can hurt the *shell* of a believer; but, blessed be God — all the bulls of Bashan, if collected, cannot touch his *kernel*. He is safe, for his life is hid with Christ in God.

I know *three Bulls* at Newport, which I believe are all very harmless, and therefore I send my love, and Mrs. Newton's, to them.

Yours,

John Newton

21th July, 1782.

Monsieur Mon Cher Ami —

Mr. Barton showed me your letter, and desired me to inform you, that though he does not think himself competent for writing — yet he hopes he is in a fair way of doing well, and gets forward daily, though slowly. I can tell you that his situation has been highly precarious — but the Lord watched over him. A small addition to the momentum

with which the ox struck him, must have fractured his skull: as it was, it put his head so much out of sorts, that he was at first, for a time, senseless, then delirious for another period, and so confused and mazy for a long time, that he could hardly think at all; his eyes, likewise, were affected — he could scarcely bear the light. But when your letter came he was able to read it. He is now cheerful, can smile, and smoke a pipe; has been abroad in a coach several times. I hope to see him about the streets, as usual, in a fortnight's time. But Mr. Sharp wishes him to come forward very gently. I believe, nay, I more than believe, the Lord has been with them both. Mrs. Barton has been wonderfully supported, so as to sit up with him (when needful) night after night. I visited them daily; she was always the same — composed, resigned, and speaking only of the Lord's goodness. They send their love to you.

You will soon receive an official letter from the chairman of the *Utopian Society*, inviting you to London. I hope you will come up as soon as you can, and fix the time in your official answer. We had but one additional member last night — but I think the Lord sent him — a man of weight, both of character and fortune. He offered hearty concurrence and assistance, upon two conditions:

1. That the academy might not be fixed nearer than thirty miles to London (if fifty, he thought so much the better). That the number of students might be small, not exceeding twelve; and, to make short of it, he moved that it was desirable the proposed academy should be formed as near as may be upon the plan lately printed and signed *Omicron* — this was carried.

2. That Mr. Bull be asked to undertake it. Two resolves to this purpose will be transmitted to you in form; the next meeting will depend upon your coming to meet with them. Now put yourself in

the Lord's hand, and make no unnecessary delay to come over and help us.

My brother and sister are with us, and it is uncertain how long they will stay, therefore we cannot lodge you; but shall be glad of as much of your company as you can afford. Your city friends will be glad to take you in, and your business will now lie in the city.

I have not time for more at present — but love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy from my dear wife, and from your affectionate

John Newton

21 August. 1782.

Dear Professor Bull, Doctor of Utopia,

Mr. Vanity has been hinting to me your impatience and uneasiness; how you have been watching the post, and counting the days, and thinking it a vast while since you heard from me. But I say, how can vanity be so vain? However, though I ought to suppose you can make a good shift without me, I am not willing to be forgotten by you, and therefore I will just enclose you a line of thanks for your last post.

I hope all your complaints are subsided — that you will not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord to the Utopians. I suppose Mr. Clayton told you how, and how far, we went on at the last meeting. It therefore had an auspicious beginning, the subscription was tolerable, considering the number present; and the mode of admitting students, etc., was settled in a way which I hoped would be satisfactory to you. Next Tuesday a little abridged account of the design is to be agreed upon, to be printed, as a sort of bill to put into

the hands of inquirers, which will save the trouble of telling the same thing over and over. I was asked to draw up something, and I have it ready to lay before them. I have little doubt but the subscription will soon be sufficient for the support of the first four, if we knew where to find them.

I went last time to withdraw, now that I had seen the society formed, and the business actually on foot; but just before we broke up, a motion was made, and passed without a negative, that I be asked to attend the next meeting. I seem to be hooked in, and perhaps shall not be able to force myself out, without breaking through proprieties; if not, I shall stay and make myself as easy as I can. Some of the wags have called us the Utopian Society; and I believe we shall assume it as our own voluntary description, and wear the reproach (if it was so intended) as our honor. But indeed I cannot complain of reproaches or persecution in this business. Having had only civil things said to me about it hitherto. Even a friend of ours, not far from Tooke's Court, thanked me for the plan, which he said he much approved in the main. I did not expect he could approve that part which glances upon church order — but he showed no disposition to dispute about it.

Mr. Webb, pastor of the Independent church, is gone — fully ripe I doubt not, like a shock of corn in due season. I loved and respected him greatly, and thought him among the first, if not the very first, of his denomination. I speak not of him as a scholar or divine. He probably was not inferior to his brethren in these characters. I knew him chiefly as a Christian; as such I thought him — eminent, solid, humble, spiritual, peaceful in himself, and of course a friend of peace. Grace reigned in his heart, and out of the abundance of his heart — his mouth spoke. He seemed to have no leisure to speak much of other subjects, and there was a savor in all that he said. His

manner of speaking showed that he knew himself. I knew no man who had less of what I call the *don* about him. He *shone* without affecting to blaze or sparkle; and while others considered him as a teacher — he seemed to consider himself as a *learner*.

In his last illness he did not speak of any remarkable consolations — but expressed an edifying, encouraging example of a calm, unshaken confidence in Jesus Christ crucified, as the sole and sufficient ground of his hope. I have lost for a season, a valuable friend — but I hope by and by to see him again. Blessed are the dead who die thus in the Lord, they rest from their labors and conflicts, and are now before the throne.

We are much as usual; upon the whole pretty well; what we chiefly lack is more gratitude and sensibility to the Lord of our life. I trust, however, the desire of my heart is towards him. We join in love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. Pray for us, and believe me to be yours,

John Newton

16 Nov., 1782.

Dear friend,

On Monday, part of a pig-hog came to our door; and though it brought no recommendation, nor could speak a word for itself — we, according to our accustomed kindness and hospitality to such strangers, gave it a friendly welcome. It was doubly welcome when the postman called afterwards, and informed us from whence it came. We thank Mrs. Bull for thinking of us, and you for seconding her motion.

My brother and sister have left us about two weeks ago. But just now we are under a cloud. Sally Johnson has been very ill. I hope she is better: in the medical phrase, out of danger. But we were apprehensive of losing her. She has had a violent pain in her breast, and we were much afraid an inflammation would take place. It is a disorder of which her mother, and several of her family, have died, which circumstance alarmed us rather the more. If the Lord should please to take her to himself — we shall feel it. She has lived long with us, has been always affectionate and faithful, and for a number of years we have considered her rather as an intimate friend, or a relative, than as a servant. She is in the Lord's hands — all whose appointments are right; and we hope he will enable us to think and say so under every change he may allot us; but I now seem to hope she will not die — but live to declare his wonderful works. I hope before the time you have fixed, she will be restored.

We are kept in long suspense about the peace. I know we shall have one if the Lord sees fit to give it us; and at any rate, there is a peace passing understanding, of which the politicians cannot deprive us. I cannot but long that a stop may be put to the horrid effusion of blood, which *sin* has so long occasioned. However, it shall truly go well with those who fear the Lord. May he abundantly bless you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and your house, and your congregation, and all your concerns. We unite in love to you all.

I am very much yours,

John Newton

20th Dec., 1782.

My Dear friend,

We love your company, and shall not be weary; but I do not mean to *chain* you: you shall be quite at liberty to please yourself if you can, and I will do my best to please you likewise. It would be strange if the men of this world were to have no fling at *Utopians*. But you know the *fable of the Dog and the Moon*. Let them bark — let us shine. Let them scold us, and let us pray for them. If we are in the Lord's way in the path of duty — a bushel of our fellow-worm's opinions, either pro or con, can do us neither good nor harm.

I hope you will preach away all your cough and pain, and come to us robust and strong as an eagle. However, we shall expect you to complain a little of course, and you will allow us to smile at you a little as usual. We meet tonight to examine the merits of the first

candidate for the academy. Mr. Odel's guinea will be welcome, and deserves thanks. Farewell! Love and a good journey to you all from

J. & M. NEWTON.

Rev. Professor and dear friend,

For once I consult your pocket and my own. It will cost you nothing to receive my congratulation for your escape out of the ditch, and your thanks to me, for it may return to me as cheap. Well, the Lord is to be owned and praised in all things. We live always upon the *brink of innumerable dangers*; for the most part they are invisible, and while we do not see them — we talk of being in safety; but if one is permitted to appear — then we account our preservation as marvelous. Whereas, the real wonder is, that we are preserved a single hour in any situation. I am glad the horse was not permitted to destroy the hopes of *Utopia* with one blow of his foot. I hope you are spared for some good purposes, and, among others, to prepare the *ministers*, who shall in due time prepare the *sermons*, by which the Lord will graciously prepare the hearts of many *sinners* to seek his face.

I hope soon to give you joy of a very promising pupil, recommended by Mr. Foster. I cannot doubt but he will please and encourage you as a first-fruit, if he is admitted. A meeting was called for his admission on Monday last — but there were only Mr. Adams, Neale, and Plummer present; and no minister being there, the gentlemen chose to defer the determination until Monday next. I was at Clapham, and therefore not in fault; nor can I attend next Monday; but I have told Mr. Neale my full satisfaction in the candidate, who, I hope, will soon be under your orders.

I showed Mr. Neale your last letter, in which the *rules* are. He thinks with me, that they are all very proper and necessary, and, so far as we know, may be sufficient; but you must be the best judge of what is requisite to establish a good *police* in your republic. But a thousand *rules* will not secure cheerful and affectionate obedience from your subjects, unless you have the Lord's special blessing to conciliate their hearts, and to keep them steadfast in the pursuit of the grand design of the institution. The society seem, one and all, at present, disposed to treat you with the fullest confidence, and to second all your wishes; and if, when the subscribers increase, there should any people be added who are not equally liberal-minded, still the committee, I doubt not, will be cordially disposed to make your service as comfortable as possible.

People will *find fault* as they please, and it is a mercy to sit loose to their opinions, and let them talk on — provided we can do it in a right spirit. I mean, from a humble consciousness that our views are upright before the Lord — and that we are simply aiming to serve him. If he smiles — it little signifies who is displeased. But we will pray for grace, that we may do nothing that can give just displeasure to anybody.

Our new institution promises well. We are now six members, and voted in a seventh last night. We begin with tea; then a short prayer introduces a conversation for about three hours upon a proposed subject, and we seldom flag. Mr. Bates usually sits silent the first half hour, and perhaps takes the second to himself in a continued discourse. The light he throws upon the subject, and the precision with which he treats it, are admirable; and so are his humility and sincerity. He is indeed a main pillar in the society, and I hope those meetings will prove a benefit to us all. I think they are the most interesting and instructive conversations I ever had a share in.

Perhaps it may gratify your curiosity to be told the points we have hitherto discussed. Take them as follows:

1st Meeting. What is the proper idea of *growth in grace*; and what are the best evidences of such growth, both in ourselves and others? Proposed by J. N.

2nd Meeting, To what is owing the different reception of the gospel among professors, so that in some it thrives, and in others seems to produce no good fruit? Proposed by Mr. Foster.

3rd Meeting. Is the decalogue a compact summary of the law of God to man? Or, how far had it a peculiar respect to the state of the Israelites at that time? Proposed by J. N.

4th Meeting. How far is it the duty of a minister to accommodate himself to the weakness, the taste, or the prejudices of his hearers?

The subject for the next meeting is to be, What influence has natural temper and constitution upon religion?

Thus far for the history of our Royal Society, which, perhaps, deserves that name more than that which meets at Somerset House; as, with us, I trust the members are all of the royal family, and the King himself condescends to meet with us.

Considering my little leisure time, I have written a long letter; shall only add our joint love to you and yours, a request for your prayers, and an assurance that I am yours very affectionately,

John Newton

Feb. 28, 1783.

My dear friend,

Your suspicions about what you term *my long silence* rather grieve me, especially as I know not how to remove their cause in future, for, as I am circumstanced, it is morally impossible for me to write as often as I would. I should hope our friendship is too strong to be affected by *punctilios*. If I was not to hear from you for a great while, though I should be deprived of a pleasure, I should impute the *delay* to a hundred causes — to any cause, rather than indulge an apprehension that your regard was abated. Judge of me the same way, and be assured that I love you dearly, whether I can find time for writing or not. When I can, I am sure I always do myself a pleasure. At present, I do not think myself much to blame, for I believe it cannot be three weeks since I wrote last.

I suppose Mr. Neale has already informed you that Mr. Gardiner was unanimously accepted, and that the society only waits for a letter from him, in compliance with the rules, and do not wish to give him the trouble of a journey to London. Your recommendation of any person upon your personal knowledge, will, I believe, be always accepted; only, to save time, it should be accompanied with a letter from the candidate. Had Mr. Gardiner written when you did, the business would have been finished at once, and upon the spot. I hope you will, upon inquiry, find that he is able to support himself as to the incidental expenses of clothes and books, as that expense does not properly fall within the society's plan. But should it be otherwise, my good offices will not be lacking. I take it for granted, he will not wish to be dependent, if it can be avoided.

Mr. Armstrong will be ready for you in about two or three weeks. He could not quit his office until today. And then he will need a little

time to settle his affairs. I trust he will prove a promising first fruit, and do not doubt of your loving him as soon as you see him. You will presently perceive that he is modest and spiritual; and I expect that, upon further acquaintance, you will find that he has a turn for study and improvement.

It is a time of feeling with us. My wife's sister is very ill — and we have little room to hope for her recovery. She buried her *husband* last May, and her *daughter*, aged fourteen, in October. Her surviving child, a girl of twelve, is now with us — a sweet, amiable creature; but it is probable she will not survive long, as she has symptoms of decline. She has been with us three weeks.

You know something of my dear wife's turn, and will judge that, with a sick sister at a distance, and a sick child before her eyes, she is tried. However, she is supported, and I trust she will be supported. The Lord is very gracious: we have found him so. He has already brought her through many of these family trials, and some of them have been very sharp. Having had such proof of his goodness in times past, why should we not say, "I will trust and not be afraid!" For he is the same; his *arm* is not shortened, nor his *ear* heavy, neither can his *compassions* fail.

Mr. Ribright languished until last Monday morning, and then died. I trust his end was safe, though his path was not comfortable. I attend his funeral this afternoon. Tomorrow evening I am to preach a sermon for him, from Psalm 46:10.

Now may the Lord bless you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and all yours, and me and my dear wife, and all mine, and bring us at last to his eternal joy. In the mean time, as often as we are permitted to meet upon earth, may it be to our mutual comfort. We send love for love. I am yours indeed,

John Newton

My dear Mr. Professor,

Mr. Armstrong breakfasted with me the other morning. I find he cannot be with you as soon as he proposed. He could not quit his place before yesterday; nor can he receive his pay, and complete his affairs at the office, until next Tuesday. On Wednesday he hopes to be at Newport. I feel a pleasure in anticipating the pleasure you will have in receiving him. I think he bids fair to be an honor and an encouragement to you.

We are to meet next Monday, when I doubt not the whole business will be settled. Your second edition of "house rules "will then be reviewed, and, I suppose, of course confirmed.

If I have any unanswered letter of yours, it is mislaid; but I rather think I wrote last. At any rate, I make no apology, because I am either so *busy* or so *indolent* that I know not when I can amend. But I can promise to love you, and think of you.

I continue to *creep on*. I preach to others with some marks of acceptance. I attempt to preach to my own heart likewise — but it is very dull, and not easily impressed. It is a strange heart; it needs to be emptied — and filled, to be broken — and bound up, to be softened — and consolidated, at the same time. And this I suppose is not peculiar to my heart only. Every heart that is spiritually alive, has its own complaints, and one great Lord attends to them all. He is not embarrassed by the variety of applications and cases: not one is overlooked, not one but is incessantly under his care and management; and though the cure is gradual, it is sure. None are

refused who apply; none who are once received — are given up as incurable. But yet, alas! my disorders prove very lingering, though under his hand. I know the cause: I too often *trifle* with him. I am not duly faithful to his prescriptions; I presume sometimes to prescribe for myself. How often have I thrown myself back by my own folly, when I seemed rather in a hopeful way! No physician but he could bear with such a patient! That I am no better — I may thank myself! That I am not worse, that I am still alive, and that I am still encouraged to hope I shall not die but live — is wholly due to his mercy and compassion.

I am sometimes almost weary and ashamed either to write or preach anymore, there is such a vast difference between what I am in myself, and the idea the Lord has given me of what a believing sinner ought to be.

Our conversations at the Castle and Falcon, which are still carried on once every two weeks, are suited to lead me deeper into the study of human nature and of my own, than is perhaps very common even among good people.

I find, upon consideration, that the *appearances* of grace are in general far beyond the *reality*; and that when proper abatements are made for constitution, association, imitation, situation, and other circumstantial — what remains that is truly genuine and sterling, would be but like a few grains of gold extracted from a heap of ore and rubbish! Or rather we are a made metal, of a golden color, and some gold in the constitution — but not much. With regard to what we call experience, the adage will hold, I am not what I appear to be.

I believe I told you my wife's sister in Scotland, is near her end — very happy in the Lord, and rejoicing in the prospect before her. She was living when we heard last — but there is no probability of her

recovery. We are now set up with two children, having received her daughter as an additional trust. She is about a year younger than Betsy — a pretty, amiable child. She brought the symptoms of tuberculosis with her — but she is much better, and we entertain hopes of the Lord's sparing her. If he does I shall be glad, because I hope I did and do sincerely give her up to his will, though I love her dearly, as I think everybody must love her, who sees her.

I am now near the bottom of my paper, having just convenient room to send our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and then to tell you in three or four short lines, according to fashion, that I am, dear sir, with great respect,

Your affectionate, obliged, and obedient friend, servant, and brother,

John Newton

25th April, 1783.

P.S. I have found your letter of the 9th, and am reminded to congratulate you on the chirping of your Oxford chicken. I hope, (as old Honest says,) he will prove a rooster of the right kind, and crow to some purpose.

Dear Sir,

Mr. Gardiner's letter was highly approved, and confirmed your recommendation and mine, which, however, would have been sufficient — but that it was necessary to comply with the rule which requires a letter from the candidate. It only remains now for you and Mr. Gardiner to fix between yourselves the time of his coming to Newport. When he is with you, you will please to inform Mr. Neale.

Mr. Whitwell's letter was very orthodox — but very short; if he writes again, he is wished to be more particular. He is thought to be a member of Mr. Saunders' church, at Bedworth, whose recommendation therefore will be necessary, and it should speak not only to his moral character — but as to the probability of his ability and capacity for the ministry. He sometime since applied for admission at Homerton — but was refused as being under age; their age, it seems, is eighteen — if he is under seventeen, he is inadmissible with us.

Mr. Armstrong has resigned his place — but no officer is appointed in his place. He expects one tomorrow — but cannot therefore be with you tomorrow as he intended. And Thursday is a holiday. But you may depend on him as soon as possible. He is on tip-toes to see Newport.

Having two students in hand, the money will soon begin to be collected, and new subscriptions applied for. And thus the business into which we were providentially and unexpectedly led to engage, is at length coming to maturity. I trust the hand of the Lord is in it, and that his blessing will forward it. The character of the two first students appears to me a favorable omen. I do not expect any two can be proposed who will be more likely to do honor to the undertaking. I shall be often with you in spirit, rejoicing in beholding your order and proficiency.

What a comfort to think that as we are by office teachers — so it is our privilege to be *learners* and *pupils* under the great Doctor and Head of the church, of whom it may well be said, "There is none teaches like him!" What a *dunce* would I have proved — under any other instructor! Nay, with all the advantages I have, I am a poor creature still. How long in learning a single lesson from him! And

then, how often and quickly do I forget, and have to learn it over again! Yet he bears with me, and I humbly trust he will make something of me at last.

I have only time and room to wish you good success in the name of the Lord, that his blessing may rest upon tutor and pupils; upon Mrs. Bull, and Tommy; your heart, your house, and congregation; upon all you preach to at Newport, Sherrington, Woburn, and everywhere else.

My dear wife is pretty well, her sister still on this side Jordan — but in daily expectation of a passage over to Canaan's shore. Our new child has still the symptoms on her, so that, though she is in some respects better than when she came to us; her state is very precarious. Love us, and pray for us; adieu.

Yours entirely,

John Newton

29 April, 1783.

My dear friend,

Until just now, I hoped the silence and the blame were all on your side; but how did my crest fall when, looking in the drawer among my unanswered letters — I found one from you! And is it possible that I have not yet thanked you for it? (though dated the 3rd of May;) and is it possible I have not thanked you, both in my own name and Mrs. Newton's, for your kind remembrance of her? Should this be the case — yet now I ask your pardon, and begin to amend the moment I am sensible of my fault, and hope you will forgive me.

A rumor has lately reached me, I know not how, that you either are, or have been, very ill; I hope it will prove but a rumor, and that a letter will speedily return, with an information either that you have been as well as usual, or, at least, that if you were ill, you are now better. If you suffer, I can feel for you, and pity you; but, at the same time, I must remember, that you are in good hands; that your afflictions are numbered, weighed, and measured with the most precise accuracy by Him who loves you better than I can do; and that they are all tokens of love, and appointed to work for your good, Such considerations, of course, must moderate my sorrow.

We are both much obliged to you for your letter to my dear wife. As little as she loves writing, I believe she would be bound to thank you herself, if she did not keep a secretary. Since I have had the honor of that office, she seldom writes. But we are especially bound to thank the Lord for so graciously supporting her under a trial, which, in its own nature, was very affecting, and which, when viewed at a distance, and as approaching, threatened as if it would be almost too heavy for her; but the Lord is all-sufficient. Long expectation of the event, in some measure, prepared her to receive the news. The known character of the deceased, her faith and hope in life and death, the consideration of where and with whom she now is, all these thoughts suggest relief. In a word, we see it is the Lord; and hope we can say, *It is well*.

Eliza, our new dear child, was likewise prepared for her part of the loss. She had been with us two months, long enough to be satisfied that we were disposed to do our utmost to supply the place of her parents. Perhaps I am but merely repeating what I have said before. Her illness continues — but she is no way worse than when I wrote last; and we might perhaps indulge more hope of her recovery, were it not that her abiding symptoms are so exactly similar to those of

her brother and sister, who died of the same disorder, and at nearly the same age. But the Lord will do that which is best.

I hope *Utopia College* is now opened, and that the Lord smiles upon the commencement. It will not be open long, as the vacation is at hand. About that time will be our quarterly meeting, which perhaps you may be present at, in your way to Tunbridge Wells, where I understand you are expected. At that meeting I suppose measures will be taken for making the academy more public, by printing the *rules*, and perhaps by reprinting and publishing the *Utopian plan*. There is but little increase of the subscriptions yet — but I trust money will come in as fast as proper students offer. Is Mr. Gardiner yet with you? If he is, give my love to him, as well as to Mr. Armstrong, who, I hope, answers the character I gave of him.

I am glad you were so well pleased with your visit to Yardly. I hope Mr. Raban has been useful at that place upon the whole. I wish that in his attempts to water others, he may be also watered himself; and that the Lord may, for his reward, give him a heart and wisdom to promote the peace of Olney, and strengthen the hands of Mr. Scott. If Christ is preached successfully, I ought to rejoice, though I cannot approve of every step that has been taken.

We are still favored with many mercies. My dear wife is tolerably well. The church at Woolnoth, my other wife, seems pretty well likewise, and has a good deal of company on some days. I have many pleasant and kind connections; but I have a *troublesome inmate*, a lodger, who assumes, as if the house was his own, and is a perpetual incumbrance, and spoils all. He has long been noted for his evil ways — but though generally known, is not easily avoided. He lodged with one Saul of Tarsus long before I was born, and made him groan and cry out lustily. Time was when I thought I would shut the door, to

keep him out of my house — but my precaution came too late — he was already within — and to turn him out by head and shoulders is beyond my power, nay I cannot interdict him from any one single apartment.

If I think of retiring into the closest corner — he is there before me. We often meet and jostle, and snarl at each other — but sometimes (would you believe it?) I lose all my suspicion, and am disposed to treat him as an intimate friend! This inconsistency of mine I believe greatly encourages him, for I truly believe he would be ashamed and afraid to be seen by me, if I always kept him at a proper distance. However, we both lay such a strong claim to the same dwelling, that I believe the only way of settling the dispute will be (which the *Landlord* Himself has spoken of) to pull down the house over our heads. There seems something disagreeable in this mode of proceeding — but from what I have read in an old book, I form a hope that when things come to this crisis — I shall escape, and my enemy will be crushed in the ruins.

Love to Mrs. Bull, and the little Bull, from my dear, and from your most affectionate, if not your most humble, friend,

John Newton

Monsieur Mon Ami,

Our journey hence was very safe and pleasant, and we found all well. I continue taking medicine, have had no return of the fever, preached three times on Sunday, and my health, strength, and appetite, seem no worse than formerly. Blessed be the Lord my healer.

My dear wife likewise is charmingly well, able to come downstairs to breakfast every day, which she had seldom done for a twelvemonth before. Eliza is in good spirits. I hope the late jaunt has done us all good. It was indeed a very pleasant month to me, no part of it more so than the time I spent in Bedford, notwithstanding the fever, for it was a very pleasant fever.

I am getting into statu quo, and seem to feel the adage "Home is home." It is a great mercy to have a comfortable home, to which we can think with pleasure of retreating, while we meet with much kindness and many pretty things abroad. I was very comfortable at Olney and at Bedford, and the one day I was at Newport — but Charles Square is more homish still. And then the church at Woolnoth, that is a pleasant home indeed. I feel myself there upon my own ground, and when I look round, I see my own family about me.

I hope the recollection of the late gentle visitation is, and will be, useful to me. The value of *health* and *time*, when improved for the Lord, the vanity of earthly things, their insufficiency to help and comfort us in an hour of trouble — our absolute dependance upon God, and many other points which might be mentioned, were brought home to my mind in the fever. I was likewise favored with great peace and composure; I saw and felt that the foundation on which I had built was fully able to bear me. The gospel appeared to me to be indeed the wisdom and the power of God; and I was enabled, like a little child, to commit myself without anxiety or reserve, to Him who promised to care for me.

My dear friend, may the great and glorious name of Jesus, be deeply engraved on your heart and mine, and on the hearts of all dear to us. Whether we consider him as our Surety, our Advocate, or our Lord,

how precious should he be! His favor is life, his service is perfect freedom. The knowledge of him is safety, wisdom, and happiness. A discovery of the glory of God in his person, fills the understanding with heavenly light, the affections with divine love, and unites the will to our proper good.

How many things utterly impossible to a man's natural strength, are feasible and easy by the right application of mechanical powers! Without them a stone of a few hundred pounds weight is immoveable — but with them he can raise a stone of many tons to the height of St. Paul's. But there are no powers comparable to those which are furnished by the *gospel machine*, if I may so speak. Thus assisted, a weak worm can do, endure, and overcome all things. He can draw near to a holy God, sinner as he is, with confidence; no wonder then that he can face a frowning world without dismay, and smile at Satan's rage. He goes on from strength to strength, and sings the song of victory while on the field of battle. Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!

I hope this will find you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, in good health. We unite in love to you all. I shall often be with you in spirit. Give my love to your pupils. May the Lord fill you with that meekness of wisdom which is from above, and make you a successful instrument in training and preparing them for his service.

Mrs. Gardiner has been much better — but two or three days ago she had a relapse. They thought she would have died — but she is reviving again. I am going to see her this morning; I suppose she can not be long for this world.

My time is now expired. The Lord bless you and yours. Pray for me and mine, and believe me to be always your affectionate,

John Newton

11th Sept. 1783.

Dear and Reverend Bull,

Though I have not much to offer, I must write for three reasons. 1st. To thank you, (if I have not yet done it) for the gifts you sent by the Northampton coach. 2nd. To prevent your thinking in a low-spirited hour that I have forsaken or forgotten you. 3rd. To draw a letter from you.

A fourth student will be with you soon. He is gone into the country to kiss his father and mother, and then means to put his hand to the plough, and away to Newport. It is Mr. Armstrong's acquaintance in Paternoster Row.

I congratulate you upon having an opportunity of showing to others what a Christian, when misrepresented, ought to do — not to hang down his head like a bulrush — but rather to rejoice if the charge is false, and if it is for the Lord's sake, Matt, 5:11, 12. Not to wear out his shoes with running about to *justify himself* — but simply and patiently to commit his cause to the Lord; who, if and when he sees good, will find a way to clear us, better than we can ourselves, Psalm 37:5, 6. Not to render railing for railing — but contrariwise, blessing; being reviled, to bless; being defamed, to entreat, 1 Peter 2:23; 1 Corinthians 4:12, 13. Our rule in such cases is beautiful and plain. Happy are they who, *knowing* these things, can *practice* accordingly when occasions arise! We know *who* has suffered reproach before us, and for us, and who was called a Samaritan, a madman, a glutton, and a drunkard; and we know how he wept and prayed for those who

knew not what they did — leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.

I wish people could learn to keep their tongues quiet; but since they will talk, and show their displeasure, I hope it is a token for good to the Newport Academy; for I take, it for granted, that this undertaking has given rise to much of the stir that has been made about you. It is said you are a mystic — but a cunning one; for that whenever I, or other of your friends, called upon you, your mystical books were presently hurried out of sight. This, so far as it related to myself, I could, and did, flatly contradict; and as to others, you might do it, and with propriety. If some good folks were to catch me reading Shakespear, I would rather hide the book than offend them; for they, being no judges of Shakespear, or of my motive for reading him, would be hurt if they saw a play-book in my hand. I would not wish them to think more favorably of play-books than they do, or to think unfavorably of me on Shakespear's account; for indeed I have not leisure to look in him sometimes for a year together.

If we declare war against *bigotry*, those who choose to defend it must, of course, oppose us. And of these, some may mean well. *Early prejudices* and *long habits* are not easily overcome. *Systems* and *parties* squeeze some people into a narrowness of thinking — which they can never outgrow. If we have more liberty and comprehension of mind, we may be thankful — but we have no right to be *angry* with them. We should remember, too, that there are extremes on both sides, and that we, as well as others, may verge too near the one, in endeavoring to avoid the other.

I believe our Eclectic Society has been increased since I mentioned it last, by the addition of two members whom we value greatly — Mr. Clayton and Mr. Latrobe. Our number is now eight: we can admit but

one more, and shall therefore endeavor to be very careful whom we choose. We think the Lord has favored us; we are all unanimous and pleased with each other. We are *one* as to *essentials*, and our *smaller differences of sentiment* are such as only conduce to give the conversation a more agreeable variety, and tend to illustrate our subjects to greater advantage. The spirit of the design is kept up, and every member seems to find it well worth his while to attend punctually. I hope I find some real advantage, and have reason to number it among my chief privileges. Help us with your prayers, that life and love, peace and truth — may flourish among us.

Our domestic affairs are much as usual: some trials — many comforts. Mrs. Newton is frequently ailing, which is but saying, in other words, she is frequently pretty well. Eliza is but so-so. I do not expect we shall have her very long, nor do I think she is in immediate danger, or much worse than when at Olney; but she certainly is not better.

We unite in love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. The Lord be with you all, and with us also. Give my love to Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Armstrong, not forgetting Mr. Inglis, though I have not the pleasure of much personal acquaintance with him.

I am affectionately yours,

John Newton

31st October, 1797

Mon Cher Ami,

I have had a cold and hoarseness — have kept house pretty much, when necessity has not called me abroad; however, the Lord strengthened me; so that, last week (including the two Sundays), I preached ten times. I may speak well of *Dr. Pulpit*, and think that I may be said, not in the worst sense of the word, to *live by my preaching*. I am now nearly well. Three doses of *Dr. Pulpit* yesterday did me good, and almost removed my hoarseness.

Eliza is much as when you saw her, only that, within these few days, she has a cough. Miss Catlett is as hearty as a buck. Mrs. Newton has been kept within doors about a week by a cold, cough, and hoarseness; but I hope she does not get worse. The rest of our family are as usual.

I preached yesterday morning from Psalm 90:9. "We spend our years as a tale that is told." A dry, dull, worn-out tale it would be, if the Lord had not mercifully taught us to aim at his service, and given us a vista — a prospect of life and immortality, through the dark shadows which surround us.

We join in love. It gives me pleasure to assure you that I am sincerely and warmly yours,

John Newton

December 29th, 1783.

Dear Sir,

The papers told me that the Wellingborough train, which went down the day you did, was robbed. I infer from your letter, that either the report was not true, or that some other vehicle had the honor of

conveying you to Newport. For I suppose, if you had fallen into the hands of the Moabites you would have mentioned it. It pleased me to hear that you had a good journey, found all pretty well at home, and that, though you yourself are but *so-so*, you were not very bad when your letter set off.

I find Mr. Sparks, who called upon me today, and who, I expect, will soon be with you, seems to have made up his mind already, and to have no other view but to the church. Perhaps you may have some who would rather receive the Lord's Supper with Mr. Scott, than as Dissenters; and as we all preach but one Lord, and mean one thing, I hope you will not only allow them to go — but give them your frank approbation. If otherwise, I am afraid disagreeables might, in time, take place. I speak not from my attachment to church — but from my *love of liberty*, my desire to see the academy flourish, and particularly from my great regard and affection for you, which induced me from the first to embark my reputation and interest in the same foundation with you.

The frost has been long and severe. This morning the Lord has bid the gentle south breath upon the ice and snow, and the waters begin to flow. How soft — yet how powerful, is the influence of a *general thaw!* It operates equally and universally in every place, and does more in an hour than the united efforts of mankind could effect in an age. I consider it as a beautiful emblem of the effects of his Spirit upon the heart, upon many hearts at once. It silently but invisibly softens the strongest prejudices; makes the heart which before was as hard as the rock — tender and yielding. It brings on a spring, and the desolate, dreary wilderness, becomes the garden of the Lord. Oh for such a *thaw* in my heart! For though I talk away in public, I know much of *wintry* and *frosty* seasons within me. I trust my leading aims and desires are right — but all that is right is so faint, so cold, so

debased by something inconsistent with it, so defective and so defiled — that I would be at my wits' end, if my hope and dependence were not, in a good measure, brought to a point.

If I am saved, (I trust I shall) it will be freely and absolutely, in a way of sovereignty; notwithstanding a thousand things which would seem, humanly speaking, to make salvation next door to impossible. But when I am beaten from everything else, it still remains true that Christ has died, that he now lives and reigns, that "he is able to save to the UTTERMOST," and that he has said, "Him that comes unto Me — I will NEVER cast out." *Never* and to the *uttermost* are great words, they have an extensive signification, and take in all varieties of cases, characters, and circumstances. Upon such unlimited sovereign promises, I cast my anchor, and they hold me — otherwise I should be the sport of winds and waves.

Dr. Watts' motto shall be mine, it is big enough for him, me, you, and for thousands that approve it, "Jesus only!" In him I have an offering, an altar, a temple, a priest, a sun, a shield, a Savior, a shepherd, a hiding place, a resting place, food, medicine, riches, honor, wisdom, righteousness, holiness — in short, everything. The paper could not contain an inventory of the blessings, and treasures — the unsearchable, inexhaustible blessings and treasures — which are hidden in him, and communicated by him to poor sinners who believe in his name. But though I am, I trust, an heir — I am as yet a minor, and in my actual *experience*, am too often more like a servant than a son. But there is a time appointed of the Father. I hope one day to be of age, and to come to the full enjoyment of my boundless inheritance.

Mrs. Newton and Eliza are much as when you saw them. We send our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and mine, if you please, to the

Utopians. Be assured that I love you dearly, and feel an interest in all that concerns you, and feel much pleasure in a persuasion that you are and will be thus minded towards your affectionate friend,

OMICRON.

21 Feb. 1784.

My dear Monsieur Taureau,

You will observe that it is not so clear to me as it seems to you, that the Dissenters hold the right of private judgment. So far as my private judgment coincides with theirs, they will indeed allow I have a right to use it — but few of them will allow me to go farther. They will rather think they have a right to judge for me, and to condemn me when I stop short of their standard. However, I love them if they love my Lord, and am glad to think we shall, before long, see eye to eye, and be all of one mind.

I think many circumstances that led to the institution of the *Newport Academy* sufficiently warrant my hope that the thing is of the Lord. If so, he will give his blessing to it; and if so, again, I need not wonder if it occasions some stir dislike and opposition. If there is good to be done at Newport, *Satan* will not stand and look on with the indifference of a mere spectator. He will do what he can to disturb the peace of the academy within doors, and to misrepresent it abroad. The tutor and the pupils, too, had need be *angels*, to keep quite out of his reach and influence; and as his own name is *legion*, so he has a legion of instruments, of various talents, in his service — some to *invent* a falsehood; and some who would not go so far as to invent a falsehood, are yet very well pleased to *circulate* it, and if

they can say, *'I was told so,'* think they are quite safe and right. The skill of others lies in *exaggerating*; of others in *coloring* and *misrepresenting* — which they do so cleverly, that though the *substance* of what they say is truth, it shall have all the effects of a lie! Others are masters in the way of *surmise* and *insinuation*. They will not say *'it is so'* — but *'I wish it may not prove so'* — which, with weak and credulous folks, answers the purpose no less than if they had proved *it certainly was so*. Again, others, when a word or an action is capable of *two constructions* — have an admirable dexterity in taking it by the wrong handle!

No wonder if the continued efforts of so many arts and so much industry should make a great noise abroad, and be sensibly felt at home. But *simplicity* and *integrity*, under the Lord's blessing, though they may be sometimes jostled — cannot be overthrown. If the Lord gives you grace and wisdom to do your part, you may depend on it he will do his, and fulfill that promise. "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper."

Utopia is in the press, and will be published with a list of subscribers, the state and *regulations* of the academy, etc., next month. By that we hope the list will be something enlarged.

I have had a cold — but it is quite gone. Mrs. Newton is pretty well, excepting now and then a headache. Eliza much as usual. We begin to think the winter long — but we expect summer will come, because we have a promise, Genesis 8:22. Equally sure are the promises of his grace.

He will not fail, he cannot change. We must expect cloudy and wintry seasons — but there are times when the believing soul hears, sees, and feels according to the beautiful description, Solomon's Song,

chapter 2:10-13. I hope it will be *spring* with you when this letter arrives; if not, wait a little, and it will surely come.

Our love to Mrs. Bull, and the young Bull, who I hope thrives and grows in a good pasture. You may tell whom you please that I am always glad to avow myself your affectionate friend and servant,

John Newton

April 3, 1784.

My dear friend,

This world is a state of trial and exercise. At present, such things are needful; but they will not be needful always. We are passing through conflict — to triumphs; through sufferings — to glory. Even at present, many things which worry us appear to our better judgment so trivial, that we are ashamed to find they can make such impression on our minds. How very trivial, then, will they be deemed when we shall be translated into the world of light! It is owing chiefly to imagination and self-will that they now owe their *supposed importance*. Before long, death shall be swallowed up of life, and the *concerns of time* will be lost in eternity — as a pebble sunk in the depths of the ocean. The first moment of our joining in the songs and joys before the throne of God — will make us abundant amends for all the difficulties we meet with in the wilderness! We shall not then say, as we often do now, when we have obtained what we earnestly desired, 'Is this all?' Fullness of joy and pleasure for evermore, with the entire exclusion of every evil, will be a *mighty ALL* indeed. We are now comparatively asleep; the greatest part of our life is spent in a succession of dreams, of which more are of the distressing, than of

the amusing kind; but, before long, we shall awake, and be satisfied with his image. The tears will be wiped from our eyes, and we shall weep no more!

Eliza has been for some time under the care of Dr. Benamor, and we hope (though an alteration is hardly discernable) she is rather better than worse. Her spirits are rather better, and we think her looks are likewise. If the Lord be pleased to restore her, I trust it will be to our great comfort; if otherwise, I hope and believe her end will be peace. I think I have given her up to him, and shall be enabled to say, *He does all things well*. But it is certain I love her dearly, and her life, in my short-sighted view, appears very desirable; though, because I am short-sighted, I dare not positively ask it.

Our other child is at home from Highgate; has something of a cold at present; otherwise, she is very well, and the picture of health. My dear wife is in her usual so so way. We have many and great mercies, both as individuals and as a family; and a few of these mercies come in *disguise* — under the appearance of *trials*.

We hope it is well with Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and that, notwithstanding all you have met with, you are still alive, and likely to live, and can smile and smoke your pipe as usual. I am your most observant, obedient, obliged

John Newton

3rd June, 1784.

My dear Mr. Taureau,

Mr. ____ was a little reserved at first; but when, by degrees, we became acquainted, we were intimate indeed. I found the Lord had already taught him all I wished to teach him, if I were able. I had heard a bird sing, that he was a well-meaning, friendly man — but as blind as a stone. It was, therefore, an agreeable surprise to find that the blind man could see as well as most of us. His views of the person and atonement of our Lord; his sense of himself as an unworthy sinner; his comfortable persuasion of acceptance in the Beloved; his hope of perseverance through grace; and the general tone of his whole conduct, gave me as full satisfaction as I have of most people whom I know — that he is not only a *real* — but an *eminent* Christian. It is true he does not deal much in shibboleths, and he likes the service of the established church, and attends his own parish, which I thought I would not find fault with, until I could point out where he might go to mend himself.

I judge him a humble, spiritual, benevolent man; and though not laced up in a *system* — yet he is of a very thinking and judicious turn. He has studied Bishop Butler, which I mention as a specimen of his cast. However, he sees beyond Butler; and understands, embraces, and admires the gospel of salvation. He told me that he was sixty-five years of age — that he has feared the Lord, and walked much in the way he does now, for many years; but could never make an acquaintance to whom he could freely open his mind before I came to him. So much for Mr. .

What with walking, talking, riding, and sailing — O *Time*, how pleasantly and how swiftly do you pass! But now I must break off at once, for my time is elapsed; and I can only add that I am very well, my dear wife is pretty well, Eliza has been rather better, and farther, that we join in love to you, to Mrs. Bull, and to Tommy. I am yours indeed,

John Newton

October 1, 1784.

Mon Cher,

I must decline all letter writing for a good while, except what is absolutely necessary. I have a *writing project* before me, purposing, if the Lord pleases, to treat you and the public with two volumes of sermons ("on the "Messiah"'], which I suppose will, in quantity, be equal to Cardiphonia. Not one of these is yet written — but all to be drawn from short notes, which I put down as I go on. To do a little daily in this business, which I mean to begin with about the New Year, I must do nothing else with my pen. My leisure time is so very scanty at present.

It is not worth inquiring when Mr. Cowper writes. If you send your letter to him, I shall have it when he writes, which is regularly once a two weeks; and if it stays with him a few days, it is no great matter, unless you write on business that requires an immediate answer; in which case, I will gladly pay the post. As to academy business, Mr. Neale is your man.

Thank you for your being glad that we had a safe and comfortable journey. I likewise am glad that yours was pleasant, and useful to yourself and others; and I hope since your return, you can say with me, "Abroad is pleasant; but *home* is home!"

We are disciples — Jesus is our Master. The world we live in is His school, and every person and event is under His management, designed to forward us in the great lessons which He would have us

learn — such as . . .
self-denial,
a distrust of creatures, and
an absolute dependance upon Himself.

In this view,
afflictions — are mercies,
losses — are gains,
hindrances — are helps,
and all things, even those which seem most contrary — are working
together for our good.

Creatures smile — or frown, caress — or disappoint us,
friends — grow cool, and enemies — become kind,
just as His wisdom sees most expedient to promote our spiritual
progress.

Where we look for most blessing — it often comes to little;
when we look for nothing — we often obtain most benefit.
Our wisest plans and best endeavors at one time produce great
troubles!

At another time, what we do at random, and what we account the
most trifling incidents — are productive of happy, lasting, and
extensive consequences.

It is well for us if, by a long train of such changing, checkered
experiences — we at length attain to some proficiency, and can say
with David, "My soul, wait only upon God; for my expectation is from
Him."

The heart possession of two maxims of Matthew Henry, is well worth
all that the acquisition can cost us:

"Every creature is that to us — which God makes it."

"We cannot expect too little from man — nor too much from God."

In this school I am placed — and these lessons I am aiming to learn. But I am a poor scholar and indeed any master but He who condescends to be my teacher — would turn me out as an incorrigible dunce!

Mrs. Newton has been unwell of cold — but is, through mercy, a little better. I am well, all but a *rheumatism*, which has made a lodgment in my left arm, and possibly may take up its winter quarters there. The Lord might have quartered it in my head or my stomach — but he is merciful to my weakness. I have not strength or patience to bear much violent pain, and therefore he is pleased to deal gently with me. We hope Eliza rather gains ground; upon the whole, we have great cause for thankfulness.

God still gives me liberty in the pulpit, which is the chief thing; and I believe no minister can be more comfortable and happy with his people than I am. Mr. Whitfield used to call his pulpit, his throne. When I am upon my throne, I can look down upon the poets, philosophers, artists, archbishops, cardinals, popes, and kings of the earth — with pity. If they know not my Lord and Savior — they are to be pitied indeed. I would not exchange the honor of proclaiming his glory and grace, and preaching his gospel to sinners a single day — for a whole life of what they account the best and the greatest.

We join in love to you, to Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. Write if you please, and when you can; but whether you write or no, remember to pray for your truly affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton

6th Dec, 1784.

Mon Cher Taureau,

I suppose Mr. Scott has before now told you that I sent the certificate for Busby's lecture, and that on the very same day the secretary decamped, which has deranged their business for a time. However, Lord Dartmouth has told me, that the application is properly entered upon the books, and that there is no reason to doubt of Mr. Thomas Bull's having an appointment next year, if he should not have it this year.

And now permit me to thank you for the nice Irish leave you took of us. The next time I went to Mrs. Wilberforce's, I asked, "Is Mr. Bull at home?" Answer — "Yes, sir; he is at home at *Newport* — and has been there these past ten days." I was a little disconcerted at having discovered myself to be such a stranger to your motions; perhaps it hurt my Vanity, which may have been formerly tickled by those who took it for granted that I, to be sure, was a sort of privy Counselor with you. Otherwise it did not hurt me at all. My friendship does not stand upon *punctilios*, and therefore though I had your company (I mean by *our two selves*) but once during the three weeks you were in London, I natter myself that you love me no less than if you had called every day, and that you would probably have called oftener, had not your headquarters been in John-street. You see I give you fair credit, and make fair allowances.

You will please to accept this letter, even though it should be short, as a special favor. I cannot write much nor often, while I have the "Messiah sermons" in hand — and this excuse for silence will last me I suppose during the present year. But I was willing to send you a

line now, that if you hear from me but little in future, you impute it not to silence — but necessity.

Your letter has slipped out of my reach just now; and the *contents* have slipped out of my memory, therefore though I acknowledge the receipt of it, I cannot properly *answer* it. I am glad you have a prospect of students, and wish we may have a prospect of money to support them. But I expect not to know much about the affairs of the academy, until Mr. Neale returns from Staffordshire, which I am told will be in about a two weeks.

Easter is a busy preaching time in our line. My texts on Good Friday were John 19:30; 1 Peter 3:18. I did not interrupt the course of the "Messiah sermons" on Sunday morning — but instead of his resurrection, I preached upon the grand event consequent upon it, which is yet to take place, Rev. 11:15. Yesterday I put Mr. Johnson in my pulpit, (who I think gives us an earnest of a judicious good preacher); today I hope to see Mr. Foster in it; tomorrow and Friday I mount it again. Blessed be God, whatever else is dear in London — the gospel is good, cheap, and in great plenty.

And now what can I say farther than what you know, and what we have said to each other over and over? *The Lord is good!* This truth, though often acknowledged, should, like his repeated mercies, be new to us every morning. Great, wise, holy, just, and gracious — he hates and punishes the sin, he saves and loves the sinner. May we sit at the foot of the cross; and there learn what sin has done, what justice has done, what love has done, what the soul is worth, and what plenteous forgiveness flows from the fountain which was there and then opened, that we might wash and be clean, and drink and live!

I wish Mrs. Bull peace, patience, and healing. I wish *Tommy* to grow in grace, as I suppose he grows in Greek. I wish the *students* at Newport, humility, diligence, and proficiency. I wish their *tutor* much light, unction, and influence. I wish myself to be willing to be what, and where, and how the Lord would have me be — to cast all my care simply upon him, and to be always satisfied in my mind that he assuredly cares for me.

I farther wish you to think often of me and mine, and to remember us in your prayers; and I wish you a good night, so no more at present — but our joint love to you and yours, from your most obedient,

John Newton

25th March, 1785.

My dear friend,

We agreed not to tease each other with letters, and I have kept my agreement pretty well. If I could *write* with both hands at once, you might hear of me oftener — but my right hand is so engaged and engrossed, that I must be excused.

But it costs me no time to *love* you — to love you and lift up my heart to the Lord to bless you, when you are upon my mind, is almost all that I can do for you. Only Sally is now going to Olney, I send this that you may think of me.

I have almost finished preaching the "Messiah sermons" — only two or three sermons more. The writing goes on slowly — but I have finished thirteen out of fifty.

My dear wife has been ill — in great pain, confined to the house more than a month, and most of the time to her room. The Lord has relieved her, and last Sunday evening she was at church. Eliza keeps pretty much at a par — but when the Lord sees it fitter for her to be better it shall be done. He speaks, and it is done.

We join in love to Mrs. B. and Mr. T. Remember mine to the young men who stand in your professorship's presence daily. May the Lord do you good, and do them good by you. My love to your son Thomas. I rejoice in the prospect of his preaching the gospel. Tell him from me what I trust he knows, and will know with an increasing evidence as he goes on — that it is not worth while to preach, unless we preach Jesus and him crucified. Ah, his name is powerful and precious indeed!

May he be our theme in the pulpit and in the parlor, living and dying. Let the world take the rest.

Happy they who can say, His I am, and Him I serve. I commend you all to his blessing. Pray for us. I am yours indeed,

John Newton

15th June, 1785.

My dear friend,

I thank you for your very kind letter, which, notwithstanding my eagerness to seize all the time I can for the "Messiah," must be answered.

(John Newton adopted his wife's niece, Eliza, after both of Eliza's parents died of tuberculosis. Eliza herself had the fatal disease, and lived with the Newtons for the last two years of her life.)

The death of our sweet Eliza was so comfortable, so glorious, that I thought it my duty to record it in writing; and my mind soon prompted me to print it, that I might the more easily inform my friends. At that time my heart was so soft, and my feelings so strong, that I could not trust myself to write a narrative for the public inspection. But when we are talking by the fire-side with an intimate friend in whom we can confide, we can indulge ourselves in a thousand little sensibilities, and, what other people would call, weaknesses, which we should not choose to utter, if we were to speak with an audible voice upon the Royal Exchange. Therefore I have written and printed only for my friends. Not one will be published or sold. A copy will come to you in due time. I wrote from my feelings, and almost dropped a tear for every word. But I would not have you think there was one sorrowful tear among them. That would have been foolish and ungrateful indeed. Blessed be the Lord, I can hardly name one of the many merciful dispensations with which he has favored me in the course of my life, which my heart is more satisfied with, or which calls more loudly upon my gratitude, than this last. A trial it doubtless was — to part with such a child; but I have not been permitted for a moment to wish it had been otherwise.

Mrs. Newton is pretty well; you know she can feel, and will expect that she did upon the late occasion; but the Lord has mercifully supported her. We join in love to you and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy; and Betsey joins with us. We thank you for your sympathy and prayers. We buried dear Eliza last Wednesday evening; and I preached her funeral sermon on Sunday evening. The church was crammed. The text she chose for herself. Rev. 14:13. I was a good

deal affected — but was enabled to restrain my emotions so far, that I was composed and master of my thoughts, and revealed no more to the audience than was suited to impress them likewise. I think I was favored with liberty, and have reason to hope it was a blessing to all.

You will excuse me, if for once I send a shortish letter. I have much to attend to at present. Whether I write long or short, seldom or often — I love you dearly, and mean more than many words could express, when I subscribe myself your affectionate and obliged friend,

John Newton

19 October, 1785,

Mon Cher Taureau,

Your letter was very welcome, and I thank you for it. It is true, we are both traveling towards that *land from which no traveler returns*; but I am so many miles before you on the road, that it is probable that I may finish my journey first. Be that as it may, our times are in the Lord's hands. I trust we shall meet there at last. In the mean time, may we be enabled to live while we do live.

We are agents for the Lord in a foreign country, where we have properly no business of our own — but are to manage for him. We are to do what we can today; for our recall will be *soon*, and may be *sudden*. Oh for grace to have all done! all ready! loins girded up, lamps burning! that, when he sends for us, we may be ready and glad to go home! Wonderful grace, that he encourages us to hope, that, unworthy as we are, he will condescend to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" *Is it possible?*

His judgment is according to truth; yet my conscience tells me that I am, in a sense, an evil and slothful servant. But I am not under the law — but under grace. He accepts the *will* for the deed. He has taught me to *aim* and to *wish* to serve him; and though my best is imperfect, defective, and defiled — he pardons for his own sake. I must plead guilty in myself, and to rest all my eternal hopes upon the blood which is able to save the chief of sinners. "Who is a God like You — who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the sea!" Micah 7:18-19. Lord, be it unto your servant according to your word!

Did you possess the gift of foresight, and think to save your credit upon easy terms, when you promised to lodge in Charles-square next time you came to town, if we could receive you? I no more thought of removing into the city, when I saw you last, than of going to Bengal; but sure enough, I have taken a house in Coleman Street Buildings. It will be mine soon. But, first, there is some painting to be done, and then we must wait awhile for the smell of the paint to go off a little. Second, there are reasons why we must go in as soon as we can. And from these premises, taken together, I am ready to infer — or, at least, to fear — that if you come up in the Easter week, you will find us either in the very hurry of relocating, or so entirely unsettled, that we shall not be able to take you in. If it should prove so, I shall be very sorry; but I must be patient, for I cannot help it. If we are in town, at your vacation, you will find a prophet's chamber; but it is possible, much about that time, we may be at Southampton, or somewhere else. We must then wait for the Christmas season, if we are all spared so long. I can only say, that whenever it suits you, and we are upon the spot — you may be assured of a hearty welcome.

Coleman Street is about half way between London Wall and King's Arms Yard. It is an airy, lightsome situation (for the City); and No. 6, which we are going to, is a very good house. I was providentially led to this house, and have it remarkably cheap. It is nearer to all my connections by a mile, and within seven minutes' walk of my church. I trust you will pray that the Lord, who has shown so much of his goodness at Charles-square, will afford us his gracious presence in Coleman-street likewise; for without him — a *palace* would be but a *dungeon!*

The "Messiah" is nearly printed off; I think it will be finished this week. But we must wait awhile for an *index*, without which I do not think a book complete. I suppose about the time you are published in London — the "Messiah" will be published. Here, again, I entreat your prayers that the Lord may be pleased to breathe his blessing upon a service, which I trust he himself put into my heart. Indeed, if it had not been much impressed upon my mind, I would hardly have had firmness and perseverance to finish it, in the midst of the many engagements and avocations which call upon me daily. Considering that I have greatly lost my habit of rising early, I almost wonder that besides other writing, visiting, and being visited — I should be able to write for the press, so much as will fill nearly a thousand octavo pages in print, in less than ten months!

If the Lord is pleased to make it useful, it would be foolishness in me to be much concerned what my *fellow-worms* may think of the performance. I expect to appear, as I am, a *speckled bird*, in the eyes of the *religious world*; and in some places I have expressed myself with a *freedom*, which will not be very pleasing to some of my superiors. I have not designed to give offence — but *some truths will offend some people*. I hope *sincerity* has been my aim — but I know my heart is *deceitful*. However, I would be very thankful that the

Lord has enabled me to finish this work — which I consider as my most important publication, and it will probably be my last, except a fugitive paper for a magazine or so. I certainly could not go to the press with a more noble subject. It will likewise have some *novelty*, and much *variety*, to recommend it.

I could easily get the letters I send you franked — but I think until you inclose mine (as I have repeatedly desired you) under cover, to Samuel Thornton, Esq., I must make you pay postage, by way of fine. I much value your letters, and would not grudge postage, if necessary. But it is so very easy to inclose them to Mr. Thornton, that the money seems thrown away, and therefore I must tax your pocket — that your *pocket* may refresh your *memory*. If you should receive this free — it will positively be the last that will come so, unless you adopt my mode of conveyance.

P__ is a good man — but young and warm; he knows little more of the world — than if he had lived all his days in a secluded forest. Help him with your advice. I hear he intends setting up Wednesday and Friday *prayers* in Olney church. Poor man, he is little aware that such an attempt will be sufficient, in such a place as Olney, to set up his name as a *heretic* and a *pharisee*. If you can dissuade him from being over churchish, at least while he stays there, you will do him a kindness.

My letter is as long as yours — but yours is worth half a dozen such. But you have what I can offer: when I can send you better, I will. My dear wife has been often ill of late — but I praise the Lord she is pretty well now. Betsey is hearty. You have the love and good wishes of our whole family. Love to Mrs. Bull, and to *Tommy the Grecian*. Be assured that I am sincerely and always

Your affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton

My dear friend,

I am very sorry about your accident — but I am very thankful that you were not hurt. Such catastrophes, as this may properly be called, have often been attended with dislocated or broken bones, a fractured skull, or instant death — so frail is man!

Often, when he thinks himself safe, and is dreaming of his own importance, as if he were a necessary part in the complicated movements of Divine Providence — he falls like grass before the scythe! And not by the hands of a giant, or the fangs of a tiger — but the smallest trifle is sufficient to destroy him!

For example — how many loose stones do we see in the road; it seems no great matter where they lie. Yet any one of them, by changing the direction of a wheel — is sufficient to confound all the plans of this mighty creature! One stone stumbles him down; he falls with his head upon another — in that very moment all his future plans perish! But the Lord gave His angels charge over you; therefore you fell unhurt, and are still alive to praise and serve Him.

I see so much of the uncertainty of life, and how little I can either foresee or prevent what the next moment may bring forth — that I would be a very great coward — afraid not only of riding in a coach — but of walking across a room — if I was not in some degree enabled to confide in the Lord's protection! "Hold me up — and I shall be safe!" Psalm 119:117

I am at Southampton, or near it. I have been at Lymington and Portsmouth. I am going today to Salisbury; tomorrow to Bath; and shall be the next day at Bristol, if the Lord permits. In the course of next week, we hope to return to *beloved home*. We have had a merciful excursion hitherto. Health, safety, kind friends, good accommodation, pleasant rides and walks, Christian converse, opportunities of hearing and preaching the good gospel. *Fresh air* and *salt water* have agreed well with me. My dear wife has been tolerable; and Betsey, who was rather poorly before we set out, looks like a country girl again. But I am still a poor creature, and know not whether my causes for *thankfulness* or *shame* are most abundant. It is well that I am permitted to look to Him who lived and died for sinners.

I must defer the long letter you ask for, until another time. We are packing up, and must set out soon. Accept this as a token of love. Continue to pray for me. Love to Tommy, ditto to Mr. and Mrs. Storry, when you see them. I can feel for them in the death of another child. But he is well disposed of; and all things are right and good for those who love God. Adieu.

Yours indeed,

John Newton

5th Sept., 1786,

Mon Cher Taureau,

You have set me a good example, and I am willing to follow it; therefore, though your letter has not been with me two hours, I begin

an answer. I am glad to hear that all is well and peaceful with you, and it is so with us likewise — such is the Lord's goodness to us. I sometimes express myself in Herbert's words:

"You, who have given so much to me,

Give one thing more — a *grateful heart*."

I believe what you disapprove, about not applying passages in the Old Testament to the Messiah, without express authority from the New, is in the twenty-third sermon of the first volume; for, in the first sermon of the second to which you refer, I can find nothing like it. I have met with such *trash* from some who pretend to *spiritualize*, and obtruded with so much confidence, that I thought it right to enter my protest against the practice, especially as I think it obtains most among rash and injudicious preachers. And though sometimes wise and good men give a little into *spiritualizing* — I think it is rather countenanced than justified by their example.

For instance, I remember to have heard one Mr. Bull preach a sermon, and a very good one, from Exodus 4:14; but though the sermon was a good one, I thought the points which he enlarged upon were no more deducible from that text, than from the first verse in Genesis. Mr. Bull, however, knew what he was about. But when such men as Mr. Page attempt to preach from Genesis 35:8, that Deborah is the law, the oak under which she was buried, the cross, etc., etc., they make wild work of the Scriptures!

I have allowed the propriety of style of preaching, by way of accommodation, and I think I have not said that we should apply no passages to Jesus unless quoted in so many words in the New Testament; but that when we propose our *own* sentiments, which are not so supported — we should do it under great modesty, which,

perhaps you will readily allow. After all, if, in this point, the observation that theologians differ, should apply to you and me — I have still the comfort of thinking, that there are not many theologians who differ less, or in fewer particulars, than we do.

I like to have the proofs of the subject he plainly in the text; but if another preaches solid scriptural gospel truth from *Higgaion, Selah*, I am content. My censure is only intended against those who affect to please, and to show their *superior sagacity* by the singularity, quaintness, and novelty of their conceits — and who think they can discover *mysteries* in a text, when, perhaps, they do not understand even the literal sense of it!

It would be better for one to run his head into a stone wall — than to go to *heathen* without a real call from the Lord, and without receiving from him an apostolic spirit, the spirit of a missionary, enabling him to forsake all, to give up all, to venture all, to put himself into the Lord's hands without reserve, to sink or swim!

I am strongly inclined to hope Mr. Johnson is thus called, and will be thus qualified. He is humble and simple-hearted. I think he would not have thought of this service — had it not been proposed to him; for some time he wished to decline it — but he could not, he dared not. I believe he has now made up his mind, and several incidents have concurred to encourage him and me likewise in the hope that the thing is of the Lord.

Your appointment is to reside quietly at home, to preach, and to lecture your pupils. You are not cut out for a missionary; and nothing perhaps would have been done, either in the West India Islands, or in Greenland — if the attachments and feelings of all men had been like yours and mine.

I must have my *tea*, my *regular hours*, and *twenty little conveniences* which I can have when my post is fixed. I would shrink at the thought of living upon *seals* and *train oil* for my nutriment. I have not zeal to sell myself to be a slave — for the opportunity of preaching to the slaves; but the Lord inspired the Moravian missionaries with resolution to court hardships like these slaves, so that they might win souls, and he gave them success.

Oh, if Johnson is the man whom the Lord appoints to the honor of being the first to carry the glad tidings into the southern hemisphere — he will be a great and honored man indeed. Let the world admire Columbus, Drake, and Cook. Johnson will in my view be unspeakably superior to them all. I do not think he has those popular talents which are so much *run after* among us; but I believe he has good plain sense, solidity, humility, and steadiness — these are the truly great talents, these are *indispensably necessary*, and these only, where he is going. I believe with his simple views, the Lord will not permit him to mistake his will in an affair of such vast importance; and therefore, if he does go — I shall hope for a happy outcome.

If I am not mistaken, sooner or later the gospel must be preached in the South Seas; if so, there must be a *beginning*. Perhaps *this* is the time. Perhaps this is the final cause of our attempting a settlement in New Holland. Often when politicians have one thing in view — the Lord has another; and their plans succeed in order to the accomplishment of his.

I find that after all my *supposed* acquaintance with the human heart, there are windings and depths in it, of which I know no more than of the dark unfathomable caves of ocean! "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how

bad it is?" Jeremiah 17:9. When I have puzzled and grieved sufficiently about things which I cannot account for nor remedy — then I try to leave them with the Lord. He alone can make the crooked, straight. It is singular indeed — and we may say of this event, as of all that went before it — God moves in a mysterious way!

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm!

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will!

You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head!

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face!

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;

God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

William Cowper

My regard for Mr. Barham and his family will make me always glad to serve him. You must, however, excuse me from speaking positively about the *Testimonium*. When he brings it to me, signed by Mr. Rose, I shall be able to judge better; but I do not choose to bind myself by an absolute promise before I see him, and converse with him. You may be sure it would give me great pain to *refuse* him. But as to finding a third, it is quite out of my reach. I know no minister who has been acquainted with Mr. Barham these three years last past. I believe I have seen him but once or twice myself within that time. The testimonial will express that I truly think him a proper person for ministry. If I should really think so in my heart, I shall be glad to subscribe it with my hand.

With love to Mrs. Bull, Tommy, and the *Utopians*, I remain your affectionate brother and servant,

JOHN OMICRON.

27th Oct., 1786.

Mon Cher Ami, Monsieur Taureau,

How many questions may a curious child ask — which a wise man cannot answer to his satisfaction — especially if the subject is above the child's capacity! Truly, we are children! We stand by the Lord, if I may so speak, while he is working; and at every turn are prone to

discover our ignorance — too often, I fear, our presumption — by our inquiries, *How* is this? and *Why* is that?

Mr. Latrobe is dead! Surely not! Why, he was a great man — a useful man. Oh! how he will be missed! Who can supply his place? We thought that, if he had been apparently drawing his last breath, the Lord would have restored such a man in answer to prayer. So *mere children* have talked; and I at one time talked thus childishly myself; at least, I thought so, if I kept my mouth shut.

But, perhaps, from what I have hinted, I can assign the cause of his death better than the surgeons who opened his body. When once we consider a man as *great* and *useful*, as one who cannot be *spared*, and whose loss cannot be easily replaced — we may consider him as standing upon dangerous ground! Do we not provoke the Lord to jealousy, by holding an *frail instrument* so high? Do we not sometimes render it proper and fit for God to show us — that he stands in no need of a sinful worm? If the Lord is pleased to raise up a servant, to honor him with an eminency of gifts, graces, and usefulness, and then take him suddenly away — we are ready to say, '*What a dark Providence! How mysterious are His ways!*' But where is the mystery of all this, if it is only to show us that he can carry on his work very well without him?

One such instance may do more to wean the rest of his servants from that idea of *self-importance*, to which we are all liable — than a thousand sermons on the subject. And so far as it has this effect — the death of a Latrobe may be more useful than his life.

Dear *Mr. Unwin* moved in a less extensive sphere — yet the loss of him will likewise be felt in his connections. But the Lord can make up all. He was with me an hour that morning he set off with *Mr. Thornton*, and he told me that he had seen *Mr. Latrobe* more than

once while he was confined at Teston, and seemed much impressed with what he had seen and heard. Little did he or I then think, that they would both die on the same day! May we be always ready! And let us remember in the midst of our preaching and teaching, that though the Lord is pleased to employ us for a while — he can carry on his designs without our assistance.

Mrs. Unwin the widow, has been very low — but is now better; I breakfasted with her at Clapham yesterday. She set off soon after to a friend's at Leytonstone, and will 'return to Stock in a few days. But how different will her house look now! Recently, it was her home; now, she must soon leave it. Recently, she could find her husband in the rooms or in the garden; but now, the place which knew him, knows him no more. But she has hope in the Lord; and he, I trust, will support her.

God is at all times and in all circumstances equally near to those who trust in him. But what avail to have a good house well furnished, large and pleasant gardens, etc., when one unexpected stroke can so suddenly throw a gloom upon the whole, and change our *Eden* into a *wilderness*. Having food and clothing, and moderate conveniences, let us be content, let us be thankful. Many have not so much. None can properly make use of more than what we have.

Mrs. Newton hopes your head is better, and your spirits pretty good. If not, send her word how you are, and how you feel, that she may sympathize with you.

Mr. R____. has indeed had some skeptical qualms about his situation in the church, and some thoughts of seceding or dissenting from us — but I hope they are blown over. I shall be sorry if he *scruples* himself out of a sphere of usefulness. But I never heard that he wavered as to the doctrines of the gospel. I hope it is no more than

what I have mentioned, misrepresented or misunderstood. But I cannot answer for him, nor even for myself — unless I am upheld. We are all poor weathercocks — if left to ourselves. I have always thought him an *upright* good man, though not the most *judicious*. My love and our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy.

Pray for us; and believe me to be your affectionate

John Newton

22 Dec, 1786.

Be so good as to send the inclosed immediately by some careful hand at your market. Should it not be received tomorrow, several poor folks at Olney will miss their Christmas dinner.

My dear Taureau,

You have already heard from Mr. Neale, and are prepared to receive Robert Cottam, whom I introduce to you by this line. He is a pretty *looking* and pretty *spoken* lad. I hope you will like him, and that, by the Lord's blessing, you will have the honor of forming him to the good work of the ministry.

My dear wife has been quite ill; is still poorly; and I am not so well as usual. A cold, hoarseness, and a touch of the fever, made me feel the service of yesterday; but I got well through.

I hope this will find you an athletic in health and spirits; laboring mightily, cheerfully, and successfully for the Lord. Love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy.

Yours always,

OMICRON.

15th Oct.

Dear Mr. Taureau,

I am now monstrous busy; but my dear wife says, I must tell you that, because you said you liked hams, she sent you last week the only one she had in the house, per Newport wagon, carriage paid. She hopes it arrived safe, and will prove good.

It is pretty well with us at present — very well indeed, considering we are sinners. We have a measure of health, at least, by intervals. We have food, clothing, and fire. We have hams for ourselves, and can spare one to send to Newport. We have the Bible, the Gospel, the throne of grace, the means of grace, the hope of glory. Ah! what cold language is it for such sinners, so favored, to say, "It is pretty well with us!" Whereas we ought to say, "His mercy is greater than the heavens!"

With our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy,

I remain your affectionate

John newton

My dear friend,

You have behaved like a mighty good Bull, as you are, in trotting over twice to Weston. I could not see you at Newport while you were in London, nor while I myself was at Northampton.

A great object with me was Creaton, where I preached twice on Wednesday. Surely the Lord dwells in that place. But who that judges by outward appearances, would look for Him in so small and obscure a village? Yet that little village is more truly glorious than all the Babylons and Romes that ever existed — though a detail of the madness, tyranny, and profligacy of those cities engages the attention of the learned, and is dignified with the name of *history*.

I have had eight doses from *Dr. Pulpit* this week, and am to take the ninth this evening. They agree perfectly well with me, only that their operation, together with the warmth of the weather, have left me a little in the lazy way.

We intend visiting you and Mrs. Bull on Tuesday next. I shall be sorry to leave Mrs. Newton behind me, and therefore, if her headache, which cannot be foreseen until it comes, should disable her from waiting on you then, I shall defer it until Wednesday. But I hope the Lord will permit us to be with you on Tuesday, provided that day be convenient to you, and we mean to be at Newport about noon.

My dear friend,

Your kind letter must be answered, whoever else waits. I should have written more early in the week — but for a strange notion which got into my head, that Mr. Thornton's intended journey into the north

would bring you to London. I found out today, by my own sagacity, that it is not unlikely he may call and take you up in his way.

Our dear Betsey is, we hope, upon the recovery; but the transition from health to sickness is usually more rapid — than the return from sickness to health. I think she gains strength, though slowly; she sleeps more, and better; and though the enemy still shoots his fiery darts at her, I think they neither fly so fast, nor wound so deeply, as they did. If the Lord is pleased to restore strength to her nerves, and to raise her spirits, which have been much depressed, I hope she will soon find herself upon peaceful ground, and that she will live to praise him. After what she has gone through, it seems almost miraculous that she is as well as she is; and perhaps the gradual and slow progress of her recovery may give a better hope that it will be complete and permanent, than if it had been more speedy.

Mrs. Newton has been much exercised; sometimes I have feared she would be overdone — but the Lord has mercifully renewed her strength; and I do not know that her health, upon the whole, has been much worse, during the last trying month, than for any equal space of time since our return from Weston. But we are growing *older*, and may expect that as *years* increase — *infirmities* will increase also. To those who are not cut off by a sudden stroke, or by some violent acute illness — sooner or later, days will come which the flesh will account *evil days*, in which little comfort will be found — but what the Lord is pleased to afford immediately from himself. We are in his hands — and they are merciful hands.

Many a time he has known our souls in adversity; heard our prayers, and granted us relief from pain and sickness, from sorrow and perplexity. And though we are unworthy of his goodness, and have been unfaithful stewards of his manifold blessings — yet his word

still gives us encouragement to trust in him, and call upon him as long as we live. May his Holy Spirit give us liberty and humble confidence to improve the liberty his promise allows — of casting all our cares upon him, with a persuasion that he cares for us. May *his grace* be sufficient for us, and *our strength* according to our day — and then all shall be well. *Time* is short, and the *sufferings* of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed. A *happy end* will make amends for all the difficulties we can meet along the way. Oh that we could learn to live with the Lord by the day, and leave the unknown to tomorrow, and all its need, with him.

The trials of *yesterday* are gone — to return no more. Those of *tomorrow* — are not yet come. The Lord mercifully parcels out to us our lot of afflictions by *minutes* and *moments* — that we might not be overburdened. But we, foolishly looking *back* to the past, and *forward* to the future — load ourselves with an unnecessary and unprofitable weight! It is no wonder, therefore, that we are often weary!

The heaviest part of our trials is owing, not so much to the dispensations which cause them, as the *self-will* and *unbelief* of our hearts. And our relief depends more upon the cure of our wrong inward dispositions, than upon any change of our outward circumstances.

At my first setting out in life — my wickedness and folly plunged me into a variety of wretchedness. But since the Lord was pleased to *find* and *call* me out of the waste howling wilderness — my path has been comparatively smooth, and my *lot* has been a highly favored one. He led me about into various places and situations; in every place he did me good, and gave me favor among my fellow-creatures; and every

change his Providence appointed me, was for the better, both as to personal comfort and to usefulness. Vile as my heart has been — he has preserved my character, he has kept me from gross errors in *judgment* — and from gross miscarriages in *conduct*. He has preserved to me my dear wife, and preserved our mutual affections unabated for near thirty years since he first joined our hands and hearts. At present I am happy in many kind friends, and endeared connections — happy in the exercise of my ministry, among a numerous, affectionate, and attentive people, many of whom are of the first rank for *real grace* and *practical godliness*. As yet, my bow abides in strength, and he has not yet taken his holy word out of my lips.

Shall I not then praise him for all that is *past*? Ought I not to trust him for all that is to *come*? I have indeed occasionally had my trials, and some of them have been sharp; but their sharpness, as I have hinted, has been chiefly owing to my lack of faith and submission. I have reason to praise him for my trials, for, most probably, I would have been ruined without them.

I am not willing to close our correspondence as soon as you speak of. I shall hope to hear from you when you are in the north, and will endeavor to pay you in the same way. May the Lord, the good Shepherd, be sun and shield to you and to dear Mr. Thornton, throughout your journey, and bring you home full of grace and peace. Remember our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. I trust you continue to pray for your affectionate friends,

John and Mary Newton

16 Jan. 1789.

My dear friend,

I thank you again. The prayers, advice, and sympathy of Christian friends, compose a cordial very acceptable in an hour of trouble. Though our effectual help be in the Lord alone, such friends are not like Job's miserable comforters, they are his instruments to us for good. I thank him for them (for who would smile upon me unless he gave me favor in their sight), and I thank them for their kindness.

Our dear child Betsey has passed through so many changes, that I knew not what to say all last week, particularly on Saturday; we were hourly expecting her death. When I went to church on Sunday morning, I no more expected to find her alive at my return, than to find her well — yet she is living still, and apparently not so likely to die soon, as she was for many days past. Neither do I see any favorable symptoms to warrant the expectation of *recovery*. But I have little to do with appearances and symptoms. She is in the hands of Him who loves her better than I can. He does all things in wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness. We are allowed to trust in God, who raises the dead. I cannot be sufficiently thankful, that she is freed from the dreadful assaults of the enemy. I have not asked for her *life* — I dare not; but I have found liberty to pray that she might be in a measure composed, and she is as much so as can be expected, considering the nature of her malady, and her great weakness.

When you are inclined to trot over to Weston, you will take, perhaps, my letters with you, and then you will probably see one that I send today to Mrs. Unwin which may contain some particulars not to be found in yours.

I cannot say that I was sorry to hear of Mrs. Wilberforce's death, though I loved her, and believe she loved me, and though she will be missed by her family and dependents greatly. Yet she suffered so

much, that I was rather *glad* than sorry to hear that she was entered into the rest and joy of her Lord. May the same grace enable us to persevere, and make us willing if such be our Lord's pleasure, to suffer afflictions for a while — since they are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.

Through mercy I am enabled to go through my public services with liberty and comfort.

The doctor is just come down stairs, and says dear Betsey is certainly better at present.

With love to Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and your family,

Your affectionate and obliged brother,

OMICRON.

30th Dec.

My dear Sir,

Whether you returned to Clapham with Mr. Thornton yesterday, or stopped at Newport — as yet I know not. The latter is possible — but in either case you will receive this, to congratulate you on the completion of your journey, to thank you for your letter from York, and to express my hope that you found Mrs. Bull, and all at home, well and in peace.

Dear Betsy is very much recovered. She has not fully regained her strength — but her health is greatly restored, and her spirits are better. The Lord enabled her to go to church on Sunday, in the

evening, and she has been there twice since. She has been several times abroad in a carriage, and walking in Draper's Garden near us. Tomorrow she goes, if the Lord pleases, to spend a few days with a friend at Stoke Newington, for a little change of air, and better opportunity of exercise.

When she first appeared at church I preached from Psalm 116:1, 2, as a thanksgiving sermon. I am persuaded that many of the congregation had prayed earnestly for her, and were glad to see her again. A revival from the state in which she lay for several days, seemed a kind of resurrection. Such proofs of His power and goodness in answer to prayer, justly demand returns of gratitude, love, and praise; and give us fresh encouragement to call upon him as long as we live.

I hope we shall not call upon him only when we are in *trouble* — but keep closer to him, and more sensibly dependent upon him, if he sees fit to afford us an interval of ease and prosperity. And we may expect more changes; clouds will return, new troubles will arise — but, blessed be his name, we know *where* to apply for help in every time of need. He who has delivered, and who does deliver, will support and deliver to the end.

Pray for me, my friend, that the late dispensation, which was not joyous but grievous, may be sanctified to myself and to my dear Mrs. Newton. Though the Lord mercifully upheld me in my *public* line, I was conscious of a languor in my *private* walk, and in the inward frame of my spirit before him, which must have stopped my mouth from complaining, had he sent a still more severe visitation to arouse me. It is a mercy not to be *deserted* and put to shame before the people. But the exercise of *gifts* and of *grace* — are different and

distinct things. Pray that I may not have suffered in vain — but may have reason to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Pray likewise for the dear child. She likewise is afraid lest she should lose the sense of what the Lord has shown her and done for her. Those jealous fears which arise from a sense of our own *weakness*, and the *snares* and *dangers* that surround us, and which urge us to cry to him, who alone is able to keep us from falling, "Hold me up — and I shall be safe!" are rather to be encouraged than suppressed. In this sense it is said, "Happy is the man who fears always." But I have a well-grounded hope, that she has been drawn by his grace, truly to yield and entrust herself to him, and that he has taken such fast hold of her heart, that nothing shall be able to separate her from his love. He will permit neither force nor fraud, to pluck those out of his hands, whom he has once enabled simply and sincerely to commit their all to him.

Mrs. Newton continues much as usual. She had been confined from church some weeks before Betsey's illness, and has not been there yet. But she is not confined to her bed, nor often to her room. Last Thursday we entered the fortieth year of our joint reign. At our time of life — it is less to be wondered that one of us should be *ailing*, than that either of us should be *well*. My health hitherto seems as firm as ever, and I feel little abatement of my powers either of body or mind, so far as concerns my ministry; which ought to be, and I hope is, the chief consideration which makes health or life valuable in my view.

But at the age of sixty-four — I cannot expect to get on thus well, for a great while. But it does not matter, my times are in His hands who does all things well. Only may he enable me to live to him while I do live, and to serve him while I can do anything; and when he calls me or disables me — to retire with a good grace and a good hope,

rejoicing that I am no longer needed, and that he has other instruments coming forward to carry on his merciful designs, I hope with greater zeal and success than I knew in my best times.

Mr. Atkins, the blind man, desired me to speak to Mr. Thornton, on behalf of the youth (Cottam, I think, you call him), whom Mr. Neale sent to Newport. I thought I would — but upon second thoughts, which are sometimes best, it seemed better to refer the business to you. I truly believe Atkins is a good and benevolent person. He respected this young man (who had lived some time with him) and wished to assist him in his views to the ministry. John Ryland, according to the known warmth of his spirit, pushed him on. "Never talk of prudence, trust in God, he will incline your friends to assist you in the necessary expense. Faith jumps over mountains — or removes them, etc." Mr. Atkins hastily followed his advice, and he found friends to assist him at first — but they have dropped, and they have left poor Atkins in a difficulty. He is unwilling to desert the young man, and unable to support him. If you think the young man deserving, and choose to mention him to Mr. Thornton, as he is under your care, I judge it will come with more propriety from you. Let me know your mind when you are at leisure.

We all join in love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy.

I have not time to treat on the particulars of your letter.

Dear Taureau,

My dear wife thanks you for your kind concern about her; and so do I. Though she has now and then, and here and there, a pain or illness — she is, in the main, and upon the whole, tolerable; and, compared

with what she was at this time last year, we have great cause for thankfulness.

I have already written more than the three lines you asked for; but when writing to you, would time permit, I would send three sheets. I will at least keep on until the barber or the breakfast stops me.

This is Mrs. Newton's birthday. For many years I used to keep the anniversary of her birth and my own, and of our marriage, as fast days. Not that I was sorry that we were born, or sorry that the Lord brought us together; but I observed it as a day of solemn prayer and praise. How very different must the history of my life have been, if she had not been sent into the world after me! Then, most probably, I should neither have known Guinea nor Woolnoth. She is evidently the human *hinge* on which my whole life has turned. She was the occasion, though not the cause, of that series of foolish conduct on my part, which plunged me into the misery of African bondage; and when I was there, I was so infatuated and degraded in my spirit — so riveted to my chains, that I think nothing but the attachment I felt for her, which remained when every other moral or prudential sentiment was effaced from my mind, could have induced me to return.

You will find an abridgment of my life thus far in Deuteronomy 32:10-15, "In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him. He made him ride on the heights of the land and fed him with the fruit of the fields. He nourished him with honey from the rock, and with oil from the flinty crag, with curds and milk from herd and flock and

with fattened lambs and goats, with choice rams of Bashan and the finest kernels of wheat. You drank the foaming blood of the grape. Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior."

You may find another in Isaiah 42:16, "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them." I meet with several passages in the Psalms, likewise, which seem so suitable to my case, as if written on purpose, particularly in the 71st Psalm, which came in the course of my reading this morning. I have been a wonder to many — and may well be a wonder to myself!

The 12th will be our wedding anniversary. Just forty years ago we joined hands, and entered together upon the world's wilderness. We knew not the right path across it — but seemed disposed to take the first that offered. But we had not wandered far, before the Lord, whom we little thought of, was pleased to give us some sense of our need of a guide; and from that time, he has taken upon himself the care and cost of our journey. He himself has been our guard and guide, our sun and shield, our physician and provider, our Counselor and our comforter. Oh that we had more regarded his counsel, and more prized his comforts!

Very different has been the path by which he has led us, from that which we would have chosen, if permitted, for ourselves. Many situations we have been in, many changes we have seen; but having obtained help from God — we continue to this day.

Again we are spared to set up a new Ebenezer. The greater part of our journey is accomplished: how much farther we have to go, He

knows — we know not. But I humbly hope he will still be our guide and guard, even unto death. The shadows of evening are lengthening upon us; the night comes; I hope it will be but a momentary night, ushering in an everlasting day.

Pray for us: I will try to pay you in kind. But I must break off. Mrs. Newton and Catty join with me in love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy.

The Lord bless you and yours abundantly. Amen.

I am yours truly affectionate,

John Newton

2nd Feb., 1790.

My dear Mr. Taureau,

How vain are all things here below! So we *read*, so we *preach*. Is it a wonder that we *find* it so? The Lord gives, or rather lends; when he recalls his own, shall we not say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Perhaps we both need a cordial. If writing should prove one to me, and reading what I write should comfort you, I shall be glad. Well then, to begin, if possible, at the right end, I will tell you though you know it, that *the Lord reigns*; and that this Lord is our Lord. He to whom we have been invited, and enabled to commit all our concerns — has all **power**, and does what he pleases among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. Consequently he is both able to help us, and to shield us from harm.

Again, his **goodness** is equal to his power, and his goodness has extended unto us. Were we not cast upon him from the birth? Did he not care for us in infancy, childhood, and youth? He not only spared — but preserved us, when we were sinning against him. Where would we have wandered — if he had not stopped us, and led us into his own fold? From that time, what a good Shepherd he has been to us! Yes long before, for he laid down his life for his sheep. His blessing has signally been with you and me, in our personal, domestic, and public concerns. He has given us many comforts, and some usefulness. He has led us about, permitted us to speak of his name in many places, and honored us with the friendship of some of his most favored people.

Once more, his **wisdom** is perfect. He does all things well; in time, manner, and circumstance. He does not indeed always inform us of his reasons — but we have good ground to be sure that they are always worthy of himself. If then he is *wise, good, and almighty* — to wish the slightest alteration in his plan and management, must be equally presumptuous and foolish! Lord, help us to say, "May Your will be done!"

We ascribe the death of believers to falls or fevers, etc. These are but the *second causes*. You will find the true cause in John 17:24, "*Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory!*" When the hour comes that he will have them with him to behold his glory — should we wish to delay them if we could? "But some of them have been so useful!" Surely they will not be useless where they are going; though we know not particularly the services appointed them there. I cannot doubt — but they will be much more noble, extensive, and important than anything they could attempt while here.

Mr. Thornton has been long a burning and shining light; he is eclipsed by his present decline — but death will not extinguish him. God will never lack instruments to promote his own cause, and to comfort his own people. I think it probable that no one man in Europe, in private life, will be so much missed at first; but I trust his place will be well supplied, even by those of his own family.

You know something of my peculiar obligations to him. I hope my respect and affection were in some degree proportionable. To him, under the Lord, I owe all my situation and comfort as a minister. It was a pleasure to me if I only saw him passing by. I believe I shall see his face no more here — but hereafter. Oh what a hope! what a prospect!

Mrs. Newton has been at no time worse than yesterday. She has had a better night than I could have expected, only, as we have so many tokens of the Lord's compassion in this affliction. We are in his hands — He knows what I feel, and what, with submission to his will, appears desirable to me; but he knows likewise, and has in some degree apprised me of my utter unfitness to choose for myself, Lord, I would, I do submit.

With our united love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy,

I remain, your very affectionate,

John Newton

My Dear Brother Bull,

The pork came safe last week; thank you, for it. Mrs. Newton was pleased with your kindness, and ate two or three bites of it the two

days following. It is the only meat she has eaten for some weeks, except a bite of pork yesterday, for a similar reason — because Judith sent it. More pork is come from you today. I thank you for this likewise; and my dear wife has again talked of eating a bit, because it is yours.

She has outlived the doctor's expectation four or five days; but he thinks she can hardly hold out above a day more. She lies for the most part very quiet; sleeps a good deal; seldom has much pain; but the extreme weakness of her body seems to have given the enemy some advantage. Her mind is locked up, and there is no drawing one comfortable word from her concerning herself. But her patience under the Lord's hands has been wonderful; and she discovers no symptoms of terror, or great distress. If the Lord is pleased to smile upon her, that she may smile upon and in death, when it approaches, I hope I shall be thankful. I humbly ask this as what seems to me very desirable; and I rather hope it will be so; but I have no right nor reason to claim it.

I trust I have sufficient warrant to say, that she knows herself to be a sinner, and knows Jesus to be the Savior. I cannot doubt but she has many a time, in the course of this long trial, committed herself to him. During her confinement, she studied the Bible with such attention, that she has marked almost every important passage in it from Genesis to Revelation with a pencil. She has gone through Dr. Watts' Hymns and Psalms, and the Olney Hymns, in the same manner; so that very few are left unmarked, and frequently there is a cross annexed to every verse.

Our affliction, though heavy to the flesh, has been attended throughout with many merciful alleviations. And to this minute, though she is so extremely weak, her spirits are good.

Through the Lord's mercy, "my mind is calm and resigned. I have not one allowed wish to alter his appointment, were it possible. His *choice* and his *hour* must be the best. Instead of complaining that she is to be taken from me now — what reason have I for admiration and praise, that she has been spared to me so long, when I have justly deserved to forfeit her every day of my life, since he first *gave* her, or, rather, *lent* her to me! How few in the married state live together upwards of forty years! Still fewer, who preserve their mutual affection unabated for so long a term! Had not *his blessing* cemented us, we might, yes, we would have been weary of each other long ago. I hope to say, *He has done all things well*. At my time of life, if I weep, it ought to be as though I wept not: the end of *my own pilgrimage* cannot be very distant. May we meet again then, in his presence to stand among the redeemed before the throne; and we shall be done with sickness, pain, sorrow, and sin, forever!

The Lord is very gracious to me. My health was never better. My feelings at times have been severely painful — but they have not affected my appetite nor my sleep; nor, so far as I can judge for myself, been any hindrance to my public service. Yesterday was a day of trial — but it was a day of liberty likewise. I think I have seldom had more liberty in the pulpit, especially in the forenoon, when I preached from 2 Corinthians 12:9.

The letters from Bath give but little hopes of Mr. Thornton's recovery; the physician says, *It is possible*. Lady Balgonie's account is rather more favorable than Mr. Henry's, though both written about the same time. I cannot say, that I expect to see him again in this world. There, my heart has another wound. My best friend and benefactor, to whom, under the Lord, I owe all that I have or am; but what is my *private* loss, compared with that of the *public*! But it is the Lord's doing. If it be his pleasure to have his servant with him

where he is, to behold his glory — we cannot detain him, nay, we ought not to desire it.

Now, I wish you a good night. I know not what the morrow may bring forth; I know not — but the Lord knows.

Tuesday is come, it is much like Monday. She is still living. Both her body and mental state are much as yesterday. Her stay cannot be long; but I still pray, and hope, and trust — that the Lord will break the force of the temptation, and bring her out of the pit, and put a new song in her mouth, before she goes. He can put it into her heart, whether I hear her sing it or not; but if he is pleased to show her a token for good, so that she can show it to us, I hope I shall not be unthankful. The treasures of both the Indies would be a *trifle* in my view, compared with the granting of this desire. She seems not to be so much harassed concerning her own interest in particular, as concerning the truths themselves, which she has formerly known and believed, and are the very foundations of hope. I am distressed — but not forsaken. The Lord is here. His *mercy* is great, his *power* infinite. He can break her fetters by a word, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and give us the oil of joy for mourning. She would send her love, if she knew of my writing; I am sure she loves you.

Love to Mrs. Bull, Tommy, etc., from

John Newton

26 October, 1790.

My dear friend,

I hope the receipt of this will not cause your spirits to droop, or your head to hang down, when I, who am most nearly interested, can begin with telling you, *all is well*. I am supported, I am comforted, I am satisfied. The Lord is good indeed! I can think without regret, of the day when the Lord first joined our hands, (excepting when I reflect on my folly and idolatry); and now I feel not much more regret, when I think of the day which separated us for a season. I trust we shall soon meet to part no more.

Perhaps the papers have already informed you of her *release from her sufferings* on Wednesday evening. For three days before, she gave little sign of life — but by breathing. Her departure was so gentle, that she was gone before we were well aware, though we had our eyes fixed upon her. This event, when it took place, was not an addition to my trial, rather a great deliverance. It freed my heart from a thousand pains and anxieties, which I could not wholly avoid, when I thought of the trying situation in which she had long lain.

The dark cloud which hung over her was mercifully dispersed, above a month before her death. Though she had not spirits, or freedom to speak much to me, it was evident from that time, that the frame of her spirit was gracious. Her patience was most exemplary, not one complaining expression passed her lips. She was rather ingenious, when her sufferings were the greatest, to fix upon something for which she had cause to be thankful, that she was preserved from agonizing pain; that the Lord laid no more upon her than he enabled her to bear; and though she could not move her body, she still had the use of her hands. These she spoke of as great mercies. Her *reluctance to dying* was entirely removed. She spoke of it with great composure; and having mentioned some domestic affairs to me, and given some directions about her funeral, particularly desiring that

Mr. Foster might bury her, she said, "Now I have done with this world," though she lived nearly a month afterwards.

I trust I am well warranted to consider her now as a happy spirit before the throne. It cannot be long at my years, before *I* shall be summoned to follow her! Had she gone to Newport one day, and had I gone after her the next day, and found her safe at your house, the separation of a single day would have been no great matter. A thousand years are as one day to the Lord, because he inhabits eternity, and, for a like reason, they should be so to us, since we are designed for an eternal state, and hastening to it.

But I trust what has taken place will not make me weary of living, until the Lord's hour shall arrive. His *time* is, and must be, the best. I am his, and not my own. My *principal tie to the earth* is broken — but opportunities of preaching the gospel, of proclaiming the Savior's glory and grace, and being some way instrumental to the good of my fellow-creatures, ought to engage me as a stronger tie to be willing to live, while he has anything for me to *do*, or to *bear* for his sake — though it could be to the age of Methuselah. The *eternal rest* that remains for the godly — will make amends for all! And eternity, itself, will hardly afford us such opportunities as we enjoy now, of acting for God, and exercising those graces which were more eminently the mind that was in Christ Jesus, while he submitted to the evils of life, and endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, for our sakes.

Oh the promised Comforter! If his influence was so great as to make it expedient and desirable for the disciples to lose the personal presence of their Lord, because otherwise the Comforter would not come; how much more should we think it sufficient to make us amends for the removal of any *mere creature*, however dear! Can our

attachment be stronger to our friends, than that of the disciples was to their dear Lord who conversed with them so kindly, was their teacher, friend, and provider? Yet, when they saw him ascend — they departed rejoicing. If they could be happy and comfortable without him, cannot the same Comforter make us so, though we no longer see the wife, or child, or the friend whom we loved?

Yes, he is all-sufficient. It befits me to bear testimony to his goodness. Doubtless, I feel the *wound* still — but it was made by a faithful friend, who will perfectly heal it, in his due time. And, in the mean time, I am not disqualified either for the duties of my ministry, or the comforts of society.

The Lord bless you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and all dear to you, your heart, your house, your church and congregation, and all your stated and occasional services. Amen. Dear Miss Catlett joins in love; the stroke made more impression upon her spirits, than upon mine; but through mercy she is pretty well again. All our family are well. We shall all be glad to see you when you come to town.

I am always, your affectionate brother,

John Newton

18th Dec. 1790.

My dear friend,

I am much as when you saw me; through mercy, no worse; and I think not a whit better, if by better is meant being less sensible of my loss. In this sense, I hardly expect, nor do I indeed desire, to be better than I am. She is always present to my waking thoughts, and I

cannot wish to forget her. Innumerable calls for *thankfulness*, and causes for *humiliation*, are connected with the remembrance of her — for she was the Lord's chief earthly blessing to me; and, through the evil of my heart, proved the occasion of disclosing the strongest proofs of my ingratitude and depravity. How often has the *gift* hidden the *Giver* from my sight! How often has my *excessive idolatrous affection* been a snare to us both!

That she was spared to me so long, and that at last her removal should be made so tolerable to me, are striking instances of that goodness of the Lord to me, which has run like a thread through my life, and has made my history singular, if not unique in the annals of mankind.

Thoughts of her are always with me, as I have said, excepting when I am asleep, or perhaps some times when I am in the pulpit; yet I am by no means uncomfortable. My health and spirits are good: I eat and sleep well. I preach, write, and converse as usual. I hope in *spirituals* I have been rather a gainer by my loss than otherwise. I think, likewise, that in the time of my trial and since, there has been an additional blessing going forth in the public ordinances. The church is more thronged than formerly, and there seems an attention and earnestness in the hearers, which is very encouraging.

I thank you for wishing me fifteen years more, because I know you meant well. I can only say that I desire to leave my times and my all in my Lord's hands. His I am, and, I trust, him I desire to serve. I am a sentinel upon my post, which I would not wish to quit, until my Commander is pleased to relieve me. I have not lost my relish for the many comforts and mercies which are still afforded me; yet, methinks, I see nothing pertaining to this world worth living a single day for. I may say it to my shame, I seem dead to the world — but,

alas! not so much by the cross of Christ, as by the death of a wife! While she lived, and was in tolerable health, I was too much content with setting up my tabernacle here.

If I am not short of *creature comforts*, I am at the same time delivered from a thousand cares and anxieties, which so long as she had lived, would probably have cleaved to me, as close as my skin to my flesh.

It will, however, be well worth while to live while the Lord is pleased to enable me — for the preaching of the gospel, and to own me in it. And should he see fit to lay me aside, I hope still to be willing to live my appointed time. May his grace make me so! If I could exercise submission, patience, and thankfulness — I might be still useful, even if bedridden. I have no notion of a *minister outliving his usefulness*, provided he is preserved in a right spirit. Might not I sit quiet in a corner, and rejoice to see others coming forward to serve the Lord better than myself, when I could serve him no more? Might not I bear private testimony to his goodness, and his truth — when I could no longer speak for him in public? I have observed sometimes that caprice, peevishness, jealousy, and other evils have stained the *old age* even of good men. My chief prayer now respecting myself is, that I may be preserved from indiscretion and folly; and that if it pleases the Lord, my *evening* of life may be consistent with my profession, and that I may set without a cloud.

When I think how signally he strengthened me of late, so as to preach when my dear wife lay dead, and to preach her *funeral sermon*, in answer to my prayers — I feel encouraged to hope that he will hear me in these petitions also.

I trust he will likewise hear my heart-prayers for you, for Mrs. Bull, Tommy, your house, and your ministry. Then it will be well with you

in all respects. Betsey is pretty well, and a great comfort to me. I am sure she means her love — but is not at home to send it. I shall be very glad when you can contrive to smoke a pipe with your affectionate and obliged friend and brother,

John Newton

30th March, 1791.

Mon Cher Taureau,

As to the Colchester business, it was settled when you were here. I was fully satisfied then, and therefore cannot be more so now. I sit down to write upon a more important subject. Mrs. Neale told me when I was there on Thursday evening, that *Tommy* was doing poorly. I entered plump into your feelings, and therefore now I must write. Whoever waits — Mr. Bull must be served.

But what can I say to you? Were you a stranger to the strong topics of *consolation*, with which the good Word of God abounds — I could soon fill my paper. I would tell you:

that all your concerns are in the hands of Him who is infinitely wise, good, and powerful;

that to him belong the issues from death;

that diseases come and go at his command;

that he does all things well;

that he can sweeten the most bitter medicines;

that his wisdom prescribes for our good;

that he is so near, so kind, so all-sufficient, as to enable us to rejoice under our heaviest trials;

that the time is short;
that the Lord will make amends for all, etc, etc.

But to write in this strain to you, would be, as they say, to carry *coals* to Newcastle. For all this, and more than I can tell you, you already know. Yet the Lord, who is the only Comforter, is often pleased to use us as His instruments to comfort one another. I may, if he pleases, drop some hint, which may touch your heart, not because it comes from me — but from Him; and, therefore, I will write on.

One thing, indeed, you could only know from me — but this likewise, I have told you before — yet I will tell it you again. I have not only read these *gracious promises*, and believe them to be true — but I have *tried* them, and *found* them to be true. I never was, strictly speaking, a father, though I think I have come tolerably near the feelings of one; but I have been a husband, and I think, in that relation, I have known all the tender feelings, both pleasing and painful, of which the human heart is susceptible. I have often thought that though I loved my friends well while living, and wished them to live as long as possible — yet if the Lord saw fit to remove them, and I had hope that they died in the faith — that I could pretty well make up my own loss, by considering to *whom* they were gone, and *how* they were employed, when I could see them no more. Thus the removal of Mrs. Barham, Mr. Thornton, and others, though dear to my heart, cost me little more than a *sigh* upon my own account. I thought, now they are *safe* and *happy* — now neither sin, sorrow, nor Satan, can touch them. They are escaped from the turbulent, tempestuous sea of this world, and are entered into the haven of eternal rest! These, and such kind of considerations, perfectly reconciled me to part with them for a time, expecting, before very long, to receive them again forever.

But when my foreboding mind has anticipated the possibility of surviving my dear wife, the question: "How I could bear it? how I could ever expect to see another cheerful hour?" involved a difficulty which could only be solved by referring it to the mighty power of God — of Him that raised the dead. I did indeed hope that he would grant me grace to be silently submissive to his will — but that I would be able to watch hours by her bed-side for her last breath; that I would think, write, and speak of her with so much composure after she was gone; that I should sleep soundly in the room, in the very bed, where she suffered so much and so long; that I should still prefer my home to any other house, and still retain a relish for all my remaining comforts — was more than I knew how to hope or to conceive.

At length, the trial which I most dreaded came upon me. Suspense was long; sensations were keen. My *right hand* was not *chopped off* at a stroke. It was *sawn off* by slow degrees; it was an operation of weeks and months; almost every following week more painful than the preceding. But did I sink? did I despond? did I refuse my food? did sleep forsake my eyes? was I so troubled in mind or weakened in body that I could not speak? Far, far from it. The Lord strengthened me — and I was strong. No part of my public service was interrupted; and, perhaps, I never preached with more energy than at that period. It was the Lord's doing, and it was marvelous in my own eyes, and in the eyes of my friends. Indeed, some who knew me not, said it was overdone, and charged me with a lack of feeling. Indeed, I felt as much as I could well bear — but not too much; and to this hour I only stand — because I am divinely upheld. Were I left a little to myself, there is enough in my heart still to make me very wretched under a sense of my loss.

However, I hope and pray with respect to Tommy — that his sickness may not be unto death — but to the glory of God, and his and your

future comfort. Give my love to him, and assure him that I shall be often with him in spirit. My love to Mrs. Bull; and I sympathize with her likewise in her part of this trial, and in all her trials, so far as I know them. My dear daughter Betsey joins me in love and best wishes. She knows that you thought of her, and prayed for her, when she was brought near unto death. When I think how near death she was — I do not give up any case as *desperate*, while *life* remains. The Lord our God can do great things in answer to prayer; but we are sure he will do all things *well*, for those who love him. Put your trust in him, and you shall not be disappointed.

I heard with great pleasure that Mr. C.'s son is respited. How different is his trial from yours! The Lord has *given* you, or *lent* you — a dutiful, hopeful, and affectionate son; and if it be most for his good and yours — he shall be long continued to you.

Believe me to be your affectionate and obliged friend and brother,

John Newton

My dear friend,

It is time to thank you for your pork, and especially for your letter; likewise, to answer your kind inquiries in the affirmative, by saying that, through the Lord's mercy, we are all favored with health and peace; and all join in love to you and yours.

Since the termination of my great trial, I have been remarkably favored indeed. I have hardly had any trial, either from within or without, the *inward warfare* excepted — of the size of a button. My health, spirits, and my strength for public service, have suffered no

considerable abatement, my table is well spread, my appetite good, and my sleep sound and refreshing.

But my *clock*, which struck sixty-six last August, reminds me that it will not *always*, nor probably *long* — be thus with me. But it does not matter. Not only the precious promises — but the long experience I have had of the Lord's mercy and goodness, encourage me to trust him for the uncertain remainder of my span; that as he has done me good all the way, led me about, and kept me as the *pupil of his eye*, so he will be with me to the end, even unto death.

Did he not redeem and deliver me from being a *slave* in Africa, take me up from the *dunghill of sin and misery*, put me among the princes, even his own children; tame the *fierce tiger* in my heart, and give me a name, a place, and service in his house? Has he not preserved me from gross errors, from gross misconduct, from the wiles and power of my enemy, though that devouring lion was always watchful, and often found me asleep? Has he not known my soul in adversity, and helped me when the help of creatures would have been utterly in vain? And does he not still invite me to cast my care upon him, and assure me that he cares for me?

I am little aware of what is yet in my heart; I know that after all this, I am still capable of distrust and repining. But he permits me to cry to him to hold me up; and as I know him to be a hearer of prayer, I trust I shall be kept in safety.

It is true, I still miss my *right hand* as sensibly as on the first day. But when it was taken from me, I was at once freed from a thousand anxieties, which otherwise would have pained me to this hour. I think, when she died — the world died with her. May the Lord prevent it rising again in my heart!

Yes, we hope for a transition in due time, from a throne of grace, to stand upon a throne of glory; to see Him who sits upon it, the Lamb who was slain, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood! Him, whom having not seen, we have obtained grace to love. Indeed, he is to be seen now — but only with the *eye of the mind*. He is the *sun of the soul* — and without him we should be like the earth if deprived of the light of the sun in the skies. There is a spiritual sunshine of which I can speak but faintly from experience; but I would be thankful for daylight, by which I can see my way, and get a glimpse of my journey's end. Hereafter there will be a *morning without clouds* — a noon without night — a long, an everlasting day. Eternal sunshine!

Mr. Adams has been apparently near death; but by blistering his legs, they have drawn off much water, and relieved him greatly. His appetite recovers, and he can now sleep four or five hours at a time, which he could not lately. The doctors think he may possibly live some time — but they do not think he will ever be well. I saw him today. He is in a comfortable frame, willing either to live or die, as the Lord shall appoint.

Mr. S___ is in town; has been with me two or three times. I believe he is a good man, and I must love him. As he said nothing upon the subject of the letter which I showed you; neither did I. *The best way of managing some things — is to forget them. Let them die in silence.* The fire in my study would have been out before now, if I had not *stirred it up*. I told you that what was said or written made no impression upon me, and you believed me. What need, then, of any further debate?

Sometimes when I read books or letters, I am almost ready to think the writers were angels; but I suppose, if I lived with them, I would

find them flesh and blood, like myself. If I was more sensible of my own inconsistency — I would less wonder at that which I observe in others. Wonderful is the patience of the Lord, who can bear with us all at once! We, alas! can hardly bear with each other one at a time.

When I was assured that Mr. Wilberforce would renew his motion in the House this session, I preached (as I did last year) about the *slave trade*. I considered it not in a political, but in a *moral* view, from Jeremiah 2:34. I think myself bound in conscience to bear my testimony at least, and to wash my hands from the guilt, which, if persisted in, now that things have been so thoroughly investigated and brought to light, will, I think, constitute a national sin of a scarlet and crimson dye. A motion since made in the Common Council for a petition to Parliament on the subject, has been negatived. If the business miscarries again, I shall fear not only for the poor slaves — but for ourselves. For I think if men refuse to vindicate the oppressed — the Lord will take their cause into his own hands. And the consequences may be dreadful both abroad and at home, whatever mischiefs may arise from hurricanes, insurrections, etc. etc., I shall attribute to this cause.

In the mean time, I would retreat under the thought that *the Lord reigns*. He has wise reasons, though often inscrutable to us — both for what he appoints, and for what he permits! Hereafter we shall know more. In the mean time, may we be found among those who are secured by a mark, because they sigh and mourn for what they cannot prevent. Ezekiel 9:4-6.

With love to all your house, and to Mr. and Mrs. Greatheed, and my prayers that the Lord may bless you indeed, and give you peace always by all means.

I remain, your affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton

24th March, 1792.

My dear Monsieur Taureau,

Mr. Bacon has found a student for you, his name is James Higgs. He has already been a preacher three years in the Tabernacle line. Mr. Bacon heard him occasionally during his residence at Hampstead, last summer, thought he had right views, a good spirit, and promising natural abilities. But he wishes for such improvement as he thinks your tuition might afford him. He is in some business — but would prefer devoting himself entirely to the ministry, and with a view of some time undertaking a stated and pastoral charge.

He is already twenty-eight years of age. He breakfasted with me this morning. I seem to like him very much. His knowledge of Latin and Greek are equal; that is, he knows not a *tittle* of either — *neither did John Bunyan*. I suppose it is too late to make him a nice classical scholar. But he may pick up with you many useful things in his mother tongue. He seems to be humble, modest, and sensible. And perhaps you may provide for the future service of souls, by helping him forward.

I told him I would write to you today, and that perhaps I might have an answer by Saturday. If you give him encouragement he will come down to Newport to see you, and to let you see him. For I advised it as best, that you should converse together, and know each other's minds, before anything was finally determined.

I have nothing to add to my former letter — but more love and good wishes to you and yours, and to tell you we are still favored with health and peace.

The *abolition* business comes on next Monday. Help us with your prayers, that He who has all hearts in his hands may give a happy outcome. On one side humanity, conscience, and the sense of the nation, are engaged — against personal interest and political influence on the other. But personal interest is blind, and mistakes its own cause. However, the battle is the Lord's. I preached on the subject on the evening of the 18th, from Jeremiah 2:34, and charged all who do not express their detestation of this slave traffic, now things are so thoroughly investigated, and notorious — with blood-guiltiness. Lord, lay not the sin to our charge.

I am in mighty haste; but whether in haste or leisure, always your affectionate

John Newton

My dear Sir And Brother,

I wished to wait upon you in the shape of a short letter (I have less time than ever for long ones) while Mr. and Mrs. Neale are with you, that I might meet you all together. If they stay their proposed time, I am not yet too late. I tried hard to smoke a pipe with you, when in town — but you were not at leisure one time, and the next not at home. Had it been necessary, without doubt we should have met.

May we meet in glory! I trust we shall. He who has invited and inclined us to seek him, will not disappoint the hope he himself has

raised, nor the taste to which only he could form such minds as ours. Such a state of happiness as the Word of God describes — a state of wonder, love, and praise, surrounding and admiring Him who sits upon the throne — would not have pleased me once. I would have preferred a pig-sty to it! Now I hope I can say, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" And you can say the same. Let us, then, rejoice, and lift up our heads. He has said, Surely I come quickly.

No one has more reason to be willing to live than I. I am still strengthened for the comfortable exercise of my ministry, am heard with acceptance, have many kind friends, abound in all temporal accommodations, and have a pleasant home. It is true *she* is gone; but it is true the Lord, who can do all things, enables me to go on tolerably well without her, and her death freed me from many anxieties and cares.

Yet were it not for his will, and what belongs to my profession and my ministry — I think I would now feel but *little attachment to this poor world*. It is thought a great matter when the same play will fill the theater for thirty or forty nights running. The *drama of human life*, presented to my view, not for days — but for months and years, affords so little variety, more than variety of woe and wickedness — that I seem to have seen enough of it. But if the Lord is with me, I shall thankfully wait his appointed time. All is adjusted by infinite wisdom and love.

Do you ask how I am employed? I am making *extracts from love letters* — not to a sweetheart — but to a wife. I have quires of these by me, which I wrote when at sea, and at other intervals of absence from home. Perhaps I shall find enough to make a Cardiphonia volume,

which may bear reading when I am gone hence. This job cannot be performed by a substitute: it will engross most of my little leisure from other business, and will, therefore, I hope, be accepted as a plea, if I should be tardy in correspondence.

This is a voluntary offering, for I do not owe you a letter, and yet I am a little mercenary, for I mean by it to draw a *return letter* from you.

Our love to your guests, to Mrs. Bull, Tommy, and all your family; not forgetting the silent young gentleman, with whom I was much pleased when I saw him at Newport. The Lord bless you all. Amen.

I am yours indeed,

John Newton

19th Oct., 1792.

Mon Tres Cher Monsieur Taureau,

Your very kind letter deserved a more early acknowledgment — but I thought I would wait until I could tell you, as I do now, that *my book* is finished. I sent part of it to the press a two weeks ago, and have had two printed sheets to revise. I have since been writing a *preface* and an *appendix*. I put the last hand (as I hope) to the whole this morning, and the first letter I attempt, after feeling myself a little at liberty, is to you. I hope and desire your prayers, that the Lord may be pleased to breathe his blessing upon the publication. I am not a proper judge of a work in which I am so nearly concerned. In some respects, it will be new; in some parts it may be amusing: but, oh that it may be *useful!* I am to be pitied, if I have employed a chief part of the winter in *picking straws*.

It will appear in two volumes, about the size of Cardiphonia — but not so much print. The type must be larger, the paper finer, and the page less crowded, to induce those who think themselves the better sort of folks (for whom I chiefly intend it) to read it. Many people judge of *books* as they do of *men* — by their *dress* and *appearance*. My patience has usually been tried on former occasions, by *delays of the printers*, I am promised, however, that it shall come abroad before August; about which time, if all is well, and the Lord favors my design, I have thoughts of visiting Southampton.

This morning Mr. Cleaver called on me, to inform me that a minister or preacher in the Dissenting line is wanted, at or near Newport, in Essex, where he lives. He says that about £90 per annum is already subscribed by seven people, and more will probably be added, if they can meet a man of sound doctrine and sound life. He was advised to apply to me, that I might apply to you. I told him that I knew you had several *olive plants* in your nursery, which I hoped would prove fruitful. But whether any of them were fit for *transplanting*, or whether they would choose to grow in the Newport soil, I knew not; any more than what the soil of Newport is: but that I would mention it in a letter I had began to you. I have now fulfilled my promise.

Through mercy, I and my dear family are still preserved in health and peace; and I hope it is tolerably well with my family, or rather the Lord's, in Lombardstreet. I trust he sometimes visits us. I love my friends. I hope I love more than my known friends. But my chief willingness to live another day in such a world as this, is upon the account of these two families. I have now no other *strong tie* to this life. My presence is not so needful to any other friends (whom I hope one day to meet in a better place) as to these.

My times are in the Lord's hands. This is a comfortable thought. He appointed the time and manner of my *coming* into the world — and he likewise appointed the time and manner of my *leaving* it. What I have known of his wisdom and goodness as to the former, warrants and requires me to commend the latter also to him. And I may be thankful that there is no need for wasting my time, by any cares or contrivances of my own. Yet when I began to write my sermons upon the "Messiah," I could not help feeling and expressing a desire that I might live to *finish* them. This desire, the Lord has granted. I felt and prayed to the like purpose while I was preparing, "The Letters to a Wife." I have been *divinely indulged* a second time. I hope I shall not always go on framing excuses for wishing to stay here. May the Lord make me always willing to stay my appointed time. But I long to feel a prevailing and abiding desire to depart and be with him, which is far better!

We return joint love to you and Mrs. Bull, and to Tommy, who, I think, is now big enough to be *Mr. Thomas*; or, *Rev. Thomas* is in my mouth. However, go by what name he may, I pray the Lord to bless him, and to make him a comfort and a blessing to you and to many.

I trust you will likewise continue to pray for us. This mutual prayer is one valuable branch of the *communion of the saints*. This clause, as it stands in our creed, is repeated daily by many who know no more of the meaning of it, than a *goose does of algebra*. Nor should we have been wiser than they, if the Lord had not condescended to be our teacher. May all the praise be ascribed to him, by you and by your very affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton

23 April, 1793.

My dear Friend

I thank you for your kind letter, which I accept as a full compensation for any or all the censures I may meet from snarling critics. I cannot expect that any publication will be approved by those who have not feelings to qualify them for understanding it. But yours is not the only encouragement I have received.

I thank you likewise for your punctual remembrance of my memorable day. It did not return unnoticed, nor unfelt by me. Though, in this respect, every day since *she* left me has been nearly alike. Thoughts of her are constantly with me, as at first; but, through mercy, it gives me no pain. I am perfectly satisfied of the wisdom and goodness of the Lord in all his appointments, and particularly in that bereavement. I know that in very faithfulness, he has afflicted me. I hope it has been good for my soul. And perhaps, in some respects, my last three years have been the best and happiest of my life.

What I say to my people, is usually drawn more from my own *experience*, than from great *books*, (the great book of God alone excepted), and as the fifteenth of December fell this year on a Lord's-day, I preached from 1 Peter 1:24, 25. It was something to the purpose of my former funeral sermon, from Hab. 3:17, 18. How striking is the contrast between the transient state of grass and flowers, of fig trees and flocks — and the abiding word of the Lord! How much is contained in *scripture particles!* An *although*, a *but*, or a *nevertheless* — is often worth a world of help, in an hour of trouble. The longer I live, the more I pity those who, when deprived of their earthly comforts, can find no cheering resources in the sure Word of God. It is no wonder that so many defy the Lord, like Pharaoh, or

that so many sink under their burden, and die of a broken heart. The natural outcome of heavy troubles — is wild rage, dark despair, or despondency — unless they are sanctified. But when the Lord employs them as a means of grace, though not joyous for the present — but grievous, they afterwards yield the *fruit* of righteousness and peace.

My *health* and spirits are good, my *needs* well supplied, my *friends* kind, my powers for public *service* not yet sensibly impaired, my *auditory* at peace among themselves, affectionate to me, and I hope in the main, in a thriving state. The ordinances are, I trust, accompanied with an unction — and though I see and feel enough to abase me in the dust before the Lord — yet, through mercy, I have peace of conscience through the great Savior. What more do I desire? Blessed be God, I have not a wish — but for more of his presence and image, for grace to serve him while I can, and that I may be found ready to meet his will in future life, and at the prospect of death. Tonight I am neither weary of life — nor afraid to die. I cannot answer for tomorrow; in myself I am unstable as water, and changeable as a weathercock. But he permits me to live with him day by day, and to leave tomorrow to his care.

I hope January will bring you to town, and therefore I content myself with what, when writing to you, I deem a *short* letter. I am much engaged at present, and therefore I chiefly write to prevent you from thinking me negligent or ungrateful. Dear Miss Catlett is well, and joins me in love to Mrs. Bull, my reverend friend Tommy, and all in your house. May the presence of the Lord dwell in it, fill your heart, and crown your ministry with his blessing.

Let us work while it is day — for the night comes. Let us watch while it is night — for the morning is at hand, the day is about to dawn to

which no night shall follow, and when our sun shall no more set. A few hills and dales more — and we shall be at home! There the wicked shall cease from troubling, and there the weary shall be at rest!

I am truly and always your affectionate friend and brother,

OMICRON.

10th Dec, 1793.

My dear friend,

I believe I thanked you for your last kind letter — but I am not sure. I know I *intended* it. For fear of the worst, I write again.

It may be some time before my leg is quite well. But it is well enough for the present, as it does not interfere with necessary duty. I walked to church last Wednesday, and home again, and hope to do so again today. When the distance is greater, or the streets very dirty, I have a carriage in waiting.

If I wrote, I told you that my texts on the Fast-day, were Jonah 3:9 and Job 34:29. My forenoon sermon is gone to the press. On such occasions I choose to print not what I *might* have said — but what I *did* say, and therefore I wrote it from beginning to end. I held it up boldly, and read it in the face of the congregation. I afterwards transcribed it, that it might be printed from a fair copy. This business superadded to the necessities of life, engrossed my whole leisure until it was printed.

My illness gained me little time, I had so many kind friends calling upon me from morning until night. But I remember when it was otherwise — when I had not one friend in the world to interrupt me, or to look upon me. Who has given me all these friends?

Though, perhaps, many *infidels* have been converted, and many *profligates* reclaimed by the power of grace — I have reason to think my case upon the whole, is a unique in the annals of the church, considering *what* I was and *where* I was — when the Lord interposed to save me from the misery into which I had plunged myself, and from the destruction which I courted; and what he has done for me, and how he has borne with me since. He has made me a wonder to many. Why am I not more a wonder to myself? That 71st Psalm, now I am old, I call *my own*. It seems written purposely for me.

I have seen great and sore troubles; I have been brought up as from the depths of the earth; and I am permitted to hope, that now I am old and gray-headed, that He will not forsake me. He justly might forsake me at last, if his *justice* were not on the side of his *mercy* by the gospel — for I have been vile and ungrateful through life. What I most value in *this life* — will forsake me. My *senses* and *faculties* will fail. My *friends* are successively dropping off like leaves from the trees in autumn. Ah, when I stand like a naked trunk upon a hill, exposed, defenseless, to every storm; if the Lord was to forsake me likewise, what could I do? But he will not. He cannot disappoint the hope which only himself could raise in my heart, Psalm 119:49. And, through mercy, poor as I am, it is the leading desire of my soul, while I remain here — in his strength to go forth, and make mention of his salvation and his righteousness from day to day.

Though I am comfortably accommodated on every side, and have not a single wish as to *temporals*, I see that to live in such a world as this,

abstracted from a regard to his will and service — would be a dull and tasteless affair for me. I thank him that I seem willing to wait my appointed time; but it is a pleasure to think I am not to remain here always, nor very long. The *when* and the *where* — I desire to leave to him. My times are in his hands; and as he has graciously promised to care for me — I have no need to care for myself.

But I must attend my church. I shall send you my Fast-Sermon, when published. My love to Mrs. Bull, the Rev. Thomas, and all your house. Miss Catlett, who is well, joins with me.

May the Lord bless you all. Poor dear Mr. Cowper. Let us pray for him! and pray for

Your affectionate and obliged,

John Newton

5th March, 1794.

My dear friend,

When I read your complaints of a cough and hoarseness, etc., I pitied you a little, for though I believe you may be poorly, you have accustomed me to think that you are, at least, no worse than you describe yourself to be. I hope when the Lord shall be pleased to send the frost quite away, you will find relief. This severe weather must be trying to *valetudinarians* (editor's note: a valetudinarian is one who is overly concerned about his health).

I sympathized with you in the death of your student. (Mr. Thomas James, an amiable and promising young man, cut off, Feb. 3rd, 1795,

at the age of *twenty*, while pursuing his ministerial studies.) But now that the Lord has declared his will — by the event, I hope you will think it rather a subject for joy than sorrow, that your *young plant* is safely housed, where no *storms* or *changes* can affect him!

But when I came to your son's dangerous return from Bedford, and the many circumstances which concurred to heighten and lengthen your anxiety; I pitied you very much. A state of *suspense* in a point where the heart is much interested — is very painful. I know, by repeated experience, how *busy imagination* is at such a time in contriving and foreboding the *worst* that can happen! I joined with you in praising the Lord for his preservation. I, likewise, join in your prayers, that a life so spared — may be wholly devoted to the Lord, and prolonged for a blessing to many.

Though *rubs* and *alarms* of this kind are not joyous — but grievous for the time — yet afterwards *sanctified reflection* upon them may do us good. They quicken our attention to the *hand and providence of God*, and bring us to a closer *dependance* upon him. When the comfort we feared to lose, is returned to us again — we feel it doubly; and we are likewise reminded of the *precarious tenure* by which we hold all earthly things! Blessed be the name of our Lord, it is not so with our *spiritual* concerns. Our best blessings are in safe and sure hands. Neither frosts, nor floods, nor flames, nor heights, nor depths — can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Psalm 116:1, 2, there is a process described, which, perhaps, has been verified to you and to me more than once. "I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live."

Trouble excites prayer,
prayer brings deliverance,
deliverance produces praise,
and likewise teaches and encourages us where to go for help next
time — yes, as long as we live.

We do not come to the Lord upon a mere *perhaps* whether he will hear us or not, for he has heard us often. Nor can we, nor need we say, that if he will help us but this one time — we will not trouble him again. We shall *always* need his assistance — and he is always ready to afford it. While we live in this poor world, trials of one kind or another will come in quick succession; but as he *has* delivered, and *does* deliver — we may humbly trust he will deliver to the end. His good promises, "My grace is sufficient for you," "As your day is — so shall your strength be," are as a *plank* sufficient to bear us up in safety, in the deepest water.

Mr, Jones, who succeeded you at Surrey, fell in the street on Wednesday, and broke his thigh. And yet *I* am still upheld, and go out and come home in safety

Farewell for the present. May the Lord be with you, and all yours. We join in love. I am your affectionate and obliged friend and brother,

John Newton

20th Feb., 1795.

My dear friend,

My *ears* have been failing for two or three years past — but lately a cold in my head almost wholly sealed them up! For about two weeks,

I could not hear a syllable of what passed in company. But the Lord has been pleased to relieve me, and my hearing, though still dull, is tolerable — sufficient for all necessary purposes. So far as my *deafness* proceeds from increasing years — it would be foolish to expect amendment. May I hear the voice of the good Shepherd speaking to my heart; then I may well submit to an abatement of creature converse!

I may be thankful that I am not mute. He still permits me to make mention of his name with acceptance to my hearers, and I hope with some accompanying impression of his influence. He might justly take the word of his truth utterly out of my mouth, and might have done it long ago; but he is patient and gracious. I trust he knows that the chief thing for which a continuance in this poor world appears to me desirable — is that, while I can speak at all, I may speak of his glory and grace to my fellow sinners!

We are still comfortable at home. Dear Betsey is in good health; and my cold did not prevent me from preaching at Easter seven times in five successive days.

We are comfortable likewise at the church. Though I feel that my memory is decaying, often by the day — it does not yet fail me in the pulpit. Perhaps I never had more *liberty* and *command of thought* than at present; and I trust the Lord favors us with his presence.

It is a part of my daily habit to look back to my slavery in Africa, and to retrace the path by which the Lord has led me, for about forty-seven years, since He called me from infidelity and madness! My astonishing unsought deliverance from the hopeless wickedness and misery into which I had plunged myself, taken in connection with what He has done for me since — make me say, with peculiar

emphasis, "Oh to grace how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be!" "By the grace of God — I am what I am!" 1 Corinthians 15:10

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home!

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine!

All in our house join in love to you, to Mrs. Bull, the Rev. Thomas, and all your family. May you and yours be as a *garden* watered by the Lord, always green and flourishing; and as a spring of water for communicating blessings to many.

I am your affectionate

OMICRON.

22nd April, 1795.

My dear friend,

Your *two guineas* are included here. I seem satisfied in my mind, that you paid them to me when you were last in town; and unless you are more certain that you did not, than I can pretend to be that you did — I cannot take them, lest I should cheat you by taking them twice! I cannot be quite positive — but I think if I had not received them, they would sometimes have occurred to my mind as *unpaid*. When this comes to hand, you may take it for granted that I have paid the money to your account. So much for gold and silver.

You wonder I do not mention my dear departed wife when I write. Indeed it would be a gratification to me to make her the top of a paragraph in every letter I write to my friends who knew her, or to talk of her to them by the hour. My feelings on this head are little less lively and abiding now than they were, when I had lived but a week after her. But I cannot command my sensibility, unless I was conscious that my thoughts of the Savior were at least equally constant and equally warm. He is the best friend, he was the greatest Sufferer. And that I am capable of thinking more of her than of Him — is certainly both an effect and a proof of my depravity.

On the other hand, I cannot wish to forget her quite yet, because there is no other earthly object in my memory so well suited to excite gratitude to the Lord, and that humiliation of heart which becomes a chief sinner.

I find it difficult to draw the line between too *much* — and too *little*. Indeed, everything is difficult and impracticable to me if left to myself; but so far as the Lord is pleased to strengthen me, I can do and bear all things that occur in the path of duty.

However, it is still a truth, that, whether I show it or not, at all times and in all places (except now and then in the pulpit) — I miss my *right hand*. The Lord made me willing to part with it. I feel not the

remotest wish to have it (if possible) again — but I still *miss* it. The idea of my dearest wife is seldom absent from my mind for five successive minutes. The time is short. I hope to meet her again to unspeakable advantage, and I am perfectly satisfied. I am rather pleased than otherwise — that she is gone before me. For, as the aspect of the times is stormy, and I know not what the Lord may do with us, I find comfort in thinking that she is safely arrived in the haven of rest. As dear Mrs. Thornton observed to me upon the death of my dear Eliza, "*I have now one care less upon earth — and one more treasure in heaven.*"

As to my own continuance or removal from this poor earth, I have nothing to do with it. Through mercy, I have no more desire — than I have right to choose. I shall live — while infinite wisdom and goodness see fit; and when He appoints — I shall depart. I hope both you and I are, in a measure, *useful* in our places — but, certainly, neither of us are *necessary*. If I had never been born, or if I had perished in my sins — God would not have lacked instruments to carry on his work. I know that *dying times* require dying strength; and I rely on his promise for it when needed. At present, while I am in health, the *when*, the *how*, and the *where* and the when of my death — does not cost me a moment's anxiety! Only may he enable me to be faithful while I live — and waiting and ready for my summons. I hope to die like the thief upon the cross. I have no hope, no comfort in myself! But he remembered me in my low estate, and I trust will remember me to the end.

I chiefly admire in Riccaltoun, his Essays on the Human Constitution, and his Commentary on Galatians 1. Indeed, I admire him throughout, as the most original thinker and writer that I have met with. Some of his sentiments are rather singular and new; but when I suspend my full assent, I am not able to refute his arguments.

The account of him which I published in the magazine is likely to be useful to his son, who is a man of good character, with a large family, and much encumbered by engagements he entered into in behalf of his father. A friend, not far from St. Paul's, sent me £10 for him, and the Edinburgh ministers are talking of a subscription for him. My correspondent says, they wonder that a minister of the church of England should be his first advocate, and that they appreciate it.

Next to the hope of perfect happiness hereafter, the chief mercy in this life, seems to be honored with some usefulness here.

With love to Mrs. Bull, Thomas, and your nieces, from myself and Miss Catlett, and my prayers for your peace and comfort in all things, I remain your affectionate and obliged

John Newton

2nd May.

My dear friend,

A pig came to our house on Monday; and, though he neither brought an introductory letter, nor could tell us who sent him — we, being something in the habit of receiving strangers, bid him welcome. In return, he entertained us. Mr. Bacon and Mrs. Gardener were very agreeably at dinner. I can only thank you now for both pig and letter.

Though your spirits are weak, I am glad to find that your faith and resignation are strong. Yes, all will be well in the *end*; and all is well along the *way*, if we can but think so, and be satisfied that the infinite wisdom and love, to which we have committed ourselves, upon the warrant of his faithful promise, will assuredly take care of

us, and lead us in the right path. We are not to expect that the Lord will miraculously interpose to change our constitutions, or to overrule the connections he has established between causes and effects; nor is it needful. If he is pleased to give strength according to the day, and to support us under our appointed trials — it is upon the whole, better for us than if we were quite exempted from them, for

"Trials make the promise sweet,
Trials give new life to prayer,
Trials lay us at his feet,
Lay us low and keep us there!"

I thank you for promising to remember me on my anniversary. My wife is still continually present to my mind, as at the first. Yet I hope I may say, to the praise of the Lord's goodness, the wound is healed. The remembrance of the event is not painful. And if sometimes a sigh escapes me, it proceeds from a certain tender feeling, which I am unable to describe — but I cannot call it *sorrow*. I rather account the last five years since her death, taking all things together — the happiest part of my life. The comforts arising from our union and affection, I still think were more valuable than any of the world's poor playthings. Yet I paid dearly for them in anxieties and inquietudes from which a single day was seldom free. And, too, too often the *gift* hid the *Giver* from my eyes! By her removal I was relieved at once from *a thousand cares and snares* which had beset and followed me through life. I am thankful that she was spared to me so long; for, though I have often thought that, if she had left me twenty or thirty years sooner, I would not have entered into a new connection, I might have thought otherwise if put to the trial; but, at the age of *sixty-five*, a second marriage would have been ridiculous, though my regard for her and her memory had been much less than it was. And though the loss could not be made up in kind, it is as well

repaid as the nature of the case will admit. No *widower* can be more happy in domestic life, than I am. Such is the attention and kindness of my dear child and my affectionate servants, that nothing occurs at home to ruffle my thoughts the year round. My needs are all supplied. I am surrounded with friends. My ministry is comfortable to myself, acceptable, and I hope useful, to my hearers: in a word, I can think of nothing which I have not — worth wishing for, if a wish could bring it. Surely, the Lord has dealt wonderfully and bountifully with me!

My *health*, likewise, is so remarkably confirmed, that I scarcely know — but by the date of the year, that I grow older. I feel no inconvenience from the changes of wind or weather; and though I have taken no journey into the country this year, I am as well as usual. The air of Coleman-street agrees as well with me as the air of Hampshire. Thus my health continues; but it will not, it cannot be so always, nor, perhaps, long. But this is no concern of mine. My times are in His hands — who has led me, and done me good thus far; and he helps me to trust the rest to him. I have only to pray, that while I do live — I may live to him; and that when he shall call me hence — I may be found waiting and willing, and that in the mean time, he may preserve me from *staining* the decline of my life, by any gross *impropriety* or *folly*. I still feel evil enough within me, to convince me that, unless he holds me up — I cannot be safe — no, not for an hour.

My dear Betsey joins me in love to you and yours. She likewise has been favored with health until lately. I hope she is mending, though slowly; she has been confined to the house seven weeks, cannot yet go to church, which I believe is a chief part of her trial, for the Lord has taught her to love to be where his people are met in his name. I trust her illness will be *sanctified*, and in his best time removed.

We hope one day soon, to be done with sin, sorrow, and pain, and to join with those who are singing before the throne the praises of Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. When we meet there, we shall part no more. Give our love to Mrs. Bull, the Reverend Thomas, and all friends, particularly to Mr. and Mrs. Greateed. May grace, mercy, and peace be with you, and your affectionate and obliged

John Newton

15 Dec. 1795.

My dear friend,

I may say, as Isaac, "I am old, and know not the time of my death!" Nor am I anxious to know it. My judgment accords with what you say of the grave; but I believe you can contemplate the subject with more sensible pleasure than I do. To me, at present, the *passage* seems dark; yet I am not startled, because I humbly hope that the Lord will be with me there, and then I am sure it will be broad light all around me. His people generally find it so, if their last illness leaves them in possession of their senses, and declare it to be so, if they can speak.

While the *frail tabernacle* is being taken down, a light of a different kind from what they experienced in health, seems to break in: they see invisibles, and hear unutterables, and breathe the air of the heavenly state, before they leave the body. What is *death* to a believer? Not that spectre and skeleton which a terrified imagination represents it. To a believer, death is a messenger to open the gate into eternal life! Or rather, it is the hour when the Savior, who is now

preparing a place for his people, will come, according to his promise, to receive them to blessed himself!

Through mercy, I do not feel myself *afraid* or *unwilling* to die. But the prospect of death is at some distance; and I believe — were death actually to stare me in the face this minute, I would tremble! Death is a great, unknown, untried transition. I often attempt to realize the moment *after* death; but my thoughts are overwhelmed. I can form no conception how I shall be, and what I shall meet — when I cease to breathe, and while those around my bed, if I die in a bed, are saying, "He is gone!"

But though I am at a loss for particulars, I have a *book* which informs me of as much as is needful to know: that those who die in the Lord are gloriously blessed; that they shall be like him, and *with* him, forever; that all tears shall be wiped from their eyes, and they shall weep no more, for sin and sorrow shall not be able to follow them. I thank the Lord for this precious book, and for enabling me to believe what I read in it. Otherwise, how miserable must I be now, flesh and heart are upon the point of failing!

But I have not much time to run on. I wish you much of that holy unction, that oil of joy, which is the best *cordial* for low spirits, and wonderfully strengthens weak nerves.

Betsey's illness is not removed — but it is so far relieved, that she was twice at church yesterday, after more than eight weeks of confinement to the house. This is a *chequered life* — but the suspension of our *common comforts* is designed to make us more sensible of their value, and more thankful for them when restored. For unless we meet with some *interruptions*, we are too apt to look upon them as matters of course.

The Lord bless you all — father, mother, son, nieces, tutors, and students, servants, and all. May your *house* be a church, and your heart a well-watered garden for yourself, and a spring of living water for your people. Amen.

I am always your affectionate and obliged,

John Newton

My dear Brother Bull,

I am a little balked that the time of your coming to town and my leaving it so nearly coincided, that I could but just see you. But as I know the ways of man are not in himself, and believe both your movements and mine are under a wise and gracious guidance — I hope it was all right. A baulk has done me good before now. If we live until the Christmas vacation, I hope to be made amends.

We spent ten weeks pleasantly abroad, and returned safely, and found all well at home, the 14th of September. We go on now in our old track; we had a nice time at Reading. I believe Mr. Eyre accepted the living of St. Giles' the very day I went there, and he was expected almost every day while I stayed — but did not come until I had left it. The people were hungry, the Lord made me able and willing. The time was short, so we made the most of it. I never preached so often in an equal space; five times in the church; twice in Mr. Young's school; every morning at Mr. Rings, and every evening in a large room of one or other of our friends. I call it all preaching, for the rooms were crowded, and I spoke nearly as long and as loud, as if I had been in a church. I trust the Lord was with us, and I trust he will be with them. I have found good individuals in many places. But

perhaps I have nowhere met with a body of professors so compact and united, so lively and yet so solid, judicious, and free from wild fire, as the bereaved people at Reading. The two dissenting ministers likewise, Mr. Douglas, and Mr. Holloway, are such as I have seldom seen. They were generally present with their wives at all our meetings, when not engaged themselves. I stayed with them a two weeks, and left them with regret.

Mr. Gunn fully supplied my place at St. Mary's; he is a nice curate. He pleases the people, and he pleases me. Though very popular, he is very humble, and remarkably punctual and attentive. The Lord has granted my desire. Expecting to be laid aside soon, or at least thinking it very probable at my time of life — I have long wished and prayed for an assistant who might keep the people together and in peace, while the pulpit remains mine. I thought myself suited first with Buchanan — but he soon went to India. Then Benamor seemed just the thing — but in one month he was translated to nobler employment in a better world; but now I hope Mr. Gunn will answer my wishes. And though he seems more troublesome than any of us to the clergy in general, the Lord Bishop of London licensed him to my curacy without the slightest hesitation.

Indeed, I have reason to hope that the Lord favors us with his presence and blessing at St. Mary's. The church is often nearly full on a Wednesday, quite crowded on the Lord's-day, and we have a large and increasing number of inquiring young people. While we go on thus, though I have seen enough of the world for myself, and know that while I remain here I must groan under a body of sin — I have great cause to be thankful that my life and health are prolonged. We may be glad to work while it is day, for the night comes. And I apprehend eternity itself, will not afford such an opportunity of preaching and exemplifying the gospel of the grace of God, to the

glory of his name and the salvation of souls — as we are favored with here. Every added day of life, if it is improved — is of great value, and an over-balance for all the *trials* we meet with in our earthly pilgrimage.

I told you I had a young man in view to send to Cambridge, and that I meant to send him to you for a time. His name is Morris; he was with us the last time you drank tea with us. And from what he then saw and heard, he longs to be with you. I hope you will be able to receive him on your foundation. At any rate, he must be in your house. I have no doubt of your liking him when he comes. I cannot see into the heart; but so far as I can judge from repeated conversations, I have no doubt of his being truly serious and gracious. He seems likewise to have strong natural abilities, and I believe would make a tolerable preacher at present.

Admiral Duncan and his brave tars have much praise for the late victory; and the gratitude of the nation at large is shown by celebrations, gluttony, drunkenness, and singing "Rule Britannia." Had the Dutch fleet been permitted to reach Brest, I think it probable that an invasion would have been attempted. I hope some people give the praise to the Lord Almighty, who disappoints the designs of our enemies, and does not yet take vengeance of such a nation as this. He has a remnant among us, and therefore He still seems to say, *Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.*

Company comes in one upon another: I can only add my love and dear Betsey's to you, Mrs. Bull, and my brother Thomas; and my prayers that the Lord bless tutor, students, family, church, and congregation, in body soul, and spirit. Pray for us.

I am your very affectionate friend, brother, and much obliged and obsequious servant,

John Newton

28th Oct., 1797.

My dear Friend And Brother,

I am sensible that you have many infirmities: so it has been ever since I knew you — yet you are still alive, and I think still likely to live a good while. It seems probable that I shall die before you — but that will be as the Lord shall appoint. *May it be our care and prayer — to live to him while we do live, and leave the rest to him who does all things well.*

I am certainly favored with a measure of health and strength, which is not common at my years. I never could preach with more ease and liberty than at present — yet I feel I grow older; the shadows of the evening are advancing upon me. I willingly leave the *how* and the *when* and the *where* of my death, to the Lord. I would only pray (and I hope you will pray for me) that when the summons shall arrive, it shall find me ready, willing, and waiting.

Yesterday and today I have not been quite well. I thank the Lord I am better again. When he sees it needful — he gives us some *intimations of our frail state*. Mine, indeed, have been few and slight. My judgment is satisfied, that when the Lord shall call me home — it will be unspeakably better to depart and be with Jesus. I have no painful doubts about the event. Surely I know whom I have believed. Surely I have committed my soul, my all, to him. I do it daily and hourly. And I am sure that the good word on which he has caused me to hope — shall stand firm when the frame of nature shall be dissolved. And yet, somehow, *clouds* and *veils* hang over the prospect. When I think of

the moment after death, my mind is startled at the change that will take place, so new, so inconceivable. But the Lord has said, As your day is — so shall your strength be, I humbly hope, therefore, I shall find a *dying strength* reserved for a *dying hour*.

He bids me cast this last care, as well as all my other cares, upon him, and he promises to care for me; therefore, I would say, *Welcome, life, with all its trials! Welcome, death, with all its apparent gloom!*

May the Lord support you under all your infirmities. In this uncertain state, we know not whether we shall meet upon earth; but I trust we shall soon meet where sin, sorrow, pain, and care, shall never intrude. Oh for the *ear* of faith, to *listen* to the songs of the harpers! As loud as from numbers without number — sweet as from blessed voices!

My dear Miss Catlett joins in love and best wishes to you, Mrs. Bull, and Thomas; and always I am your very affectionate

John Newton

8th Nov., 1797.

My dear Sir and Brother,

All is well, and I ask your pardon; I ought to have been more explicit. It is true that I have liberty to appropriate a part of Mrs. Ekin's money to prepare a young man for the college, as well as to support him there. And I am ready to do so; only, as you desired me to procure a foundation student, if I could, I thought I might as well propose one of my own as a stranger, and the saving might enable

me to send one more to the university. It will be time enough to talk of the foundation when there is a vacancy; nor shall I then wish for it, if it interferes with your intentions in favor of another. But if there should be a vacancy, and while you have no one in prospect whom you prefer, I shall be thankful for the help.

Mr. Morris had left London before your first letter came, and has not yet returned. I believe him to be a valuable and promising young man — but I have only seen him a few times at breakfast. You will be a better judge than I when you have him under your roof. If he behaves well, you will encourage him now and then by a smile, or a kind word, by mentioning him as my friend. I do not mean to ask anything extraordinary out of the common line for him — but only such little notices and attentions, as, though they cost nothing, are much prized by a generous and feeling spirit.

I thank the Lord I am as well as an *old man* can be. I think and I hope that the Lord bears testimony to the word of his grace at St. Mary's more than ever, which makes health doubly valuable. May he make me willing to resign it at a moment's warning; and to sit quiet in my chair or my bed, and rejoice that his work is prospering without me, and that others are serving him better when I can serve him no longer! A sentence in Dr. Cotton Mather's life struck me more than fifty years ago, and has been often upon my mind from that time — "My *usefulness* was the last *idol* I was willing to part with — but now I can part with that, and am content to be laid aside and forgotten, so that he may be glorified."

God would not have lacked instruments — though I had left my bones in Africa, or had been food for the sharks! Oh for grace to retire at his bidding, like a thankful guest from a full table! I have had a long and highly favored *day*. But the *night* is surely coming;

pray for me, that my decline of life may not be stained with foolishness, impatience, jealousy, or anything that might disparage my profession or ministry.

The dark prospect of the times affects me much, as it does you. And, like you, I have often questioned — how shall I behave if such and such things should take place? This seemingly humble diffidence, I am afraid, implies a supposition that I can do pretty well at present, and while things remain no worse than they are. Whereas, I am satisfied in my better judgment, that the Almighty power which sustains the stars in their orbits — is equally necessary to carry me with safety, honor, and comfort through the smoothest day of my life. Let it suffice that he knows *where* we are, and *what* we are — and can increase our strength according to our days, to any assignable degree. We do not need shoes of iron and brass — while we walk upon a soft carpet; but should the road become very rough and thorny, these shoes are always at hand — and if we ask for them, we shall have them. Faithful is He that has promised, who also will do it.

Wednesday brought news of the death of my brother at Leith. Our branch of the noble family of *Newtons* will soon be extinct, for I am the only survivor. He was a sober, moral man, an excellent sea officer, and much respected and approved in his post. He was friendly to the gospel, and constantly attended it. I do not know how far he was wrought upon by it; but his deportment upon his dying bed gives us hope that the Lord prepared him for the change, though he said but little. His widow is a gracious woman, and I doubt not but He who ever lives — will still be a husband to her. This is one attendant of old age — to see our friends and relatives drop off before us, like leaves from the trees in autumn, until we are left naked trunks. But Jesus lives.

With more love from us to Mrs. Bull and Thomas, and our best wishes and prayers for you all, I still remain and hope always to be,

Yours affectionately,

John Newton

11th Nov. 1797.

My dear friend,

Though I have but little time for writing, I must thank you for your letter. I am very glad Mr. Morris pleases you. I had no doubt but you would think him a *promising plant*. He informed me himself of the advice you gave him. I am in hopes that my letter will confirm both, and make him willing to do nothing in the preaching way, without your express direction. I think you might *exert your authority* in this case, were it needful, without any fear of grieving the Holy Spirit; but I trust a little *persuasion* will suffice. He must not be a village preacher, if he means to go to Cambridge.

I preached yesterday from Hosea 11:8, 9. The church was very full, and I hope we had the Lord's presence. In the morning, my apprehensions how the day might close, were rather dark; as I know there is much discontent abroad, and many people busy in fomenting it, and making bad worse. I was afraid lest such a concourse of people might lead to some riotous proceedings; but through the goodness of Him who rules the winds and the seas, all went off very smoothly. I hope the Lord smiled upon the design.

I would relieve all your complaints, if I could. The Lord, who loves you much better than I do, easily could — but he does not;

accordingly, he sees it best for you to have them. *Infirmities* must ordinarily increase with increasing years. I seem, at present, to be an exception to the general rule; but *my time* cannot be very distant. Oh, to be able to say, from the heart, in the hour of trial,

"How weak this *prison* where I dwell,

How frail this tottering wall,

The breaches cheerfully foretell.

The house must shortly fall!"

The Lord, who can *exempt* us from troubles, can do much more; he can *support* and can *comfort* us under them. He could have prevented the three young Hebrews from being cast into the furnace, or kept Daniel out of the den; but his power and faithfulness were more signally displayed by suppressing the effect of the flames, and by shutting the mouths of the lions. Is he not all-sufficient? Has he not promised us strength according to our day? Let us boldly venture upon his word, which cannot fail.

John Newton

20th Dec. 1797.

My dear friend,

I am sorry that you are weak and poorly; but knowing that you often touch the mournful string, I am willing to hope you are a little better than you think yourself.

If we take the report of *sense* — the times are dark indeed. But what says *faith*? What would become of us if the Scriptures were not true? And if they are true, there must be such dark times, because they are foretold, and not one jot or tittle can fail. Perhaps dark times are the brightest; for they are usually seasons when the Lord's people are stirred up, and when many who would not hear him in prosperity, are glad to seek him. I think the gospel is spreading among us, and I hope the prayers of the true remnant will so far prevail, that our enemies will not be permitted to swallow us up. They are at war not with us only — but with our God. He is taking his own wise measures, to plead his own cause, which ought to be the dearest concern of our hearts: surely we cannot wish him to lose it? Yes, the times are dark; for though his hand is lifted up, they will not see it. *Dissipation* and *folly* are as rampant — as if the nation were in perfect peace and security. Can we assign any reason why such a nation as this, which has abused greater light and privilege than any in Europe, should be exempted from the general shaking?

Do not think that my faith is very strong. While I smoke my pipe peaceably, I can talk or write, according to what I read in the Bible; but were the French actually permitted to come, if I was left to myself, perhaps I might flee into the woods, or creep into a cupboard. However, I am aiming to rely upon Him, who has said, "As your day is — so shall your strength be." The Lord is faithful, and if this promise is fulfilled, we shall do very well. Why should not we take joyfully the confiscation of our goods, and count it an honor to lay down our lives for his sake if called to it, as others have done before us? They were no better in themselves than we, nor had they a better gospel than ours. Is not He who supported them — able to support us also? Their feet were as tender as ours; but when the way was very rough, he gave them shoes of iron and brass; and I trust

there are more such shoes upon the *shelf* for our use likewise, if we should need them.

I cannot be poorer than I was when the Lord brought me from African Egypt, from being a slave of slaves. Nor can I be in more apparent danger than I have often been at sea in a storm; even the French are not more irresistible or more inexorable than the raging billows in a tempest. The Lord has delivered me from the paw of many a lion, and of many a bear; why then should I be afraid of this atheistic Philistine, who has defied not only the armies of the living God — but the living God himself?

Indeed, I trust they will not be allowed to execute all their malicious rage and threatenings against us. But they will probably alarm us. And then, like Israel at the Red Sea, we shall cry to the Lord, and I hope like them we shall be heard and preserved. He could have easily prevented Pharaoh and his army from following them; but, had he done so, Israel would not have known that glorious display of his power and goodness on their behalf in dividing the waters and drowning their enemies.

All these things shall eventually promote the glory of his name, the good of his church, and the spread of the gospel. The French, like the Jews when they crucified the Messiah, will only execute what God has already appointed to be done. I wish to watch, and pray, and mourn for the abounding of sin, and the abounding woes with which sin has filled the world. Nor would I forget *my own sins*, which contribute to fill the *national cup*; for the rest, I know that He does and will do all things well. And when you and I shall meet on one of the green and flowery mounts, which Dr. Watts speaks of — we shall see it more clearly. Until then may His peace rule in our hearts. Give our joint love to Mrs. Bull, brother Thomas, Mr. Morris, and to all

your family. Pray for us. We shall be glad to see you in London. May the Lord be a sun and a shield to you and to us.

I am yours very affectionately and obliged,

John Newton

26th April, 1798.

My dear Old friend,

Though the flame of our affection is not much supported by the fuel of frequent letters and converse, I trust it still burns brightly, for it is fed from a secret, invisible, and inexhaustible source. If two needles are properly touched by a magnet, they will retain their sympathy for a long time. But if two hearts are truly united to the *Heavenly Magnet*, their mutual attraction will be permanent in time and to eternity, Blessed be the Lord for a good hope — that it is thus between you and me. I could not love you better if I saw you or heard from you every day.

Dear Miss Catlett, and I, and all the dear family we are with, consisting of about twenty people, are well. We lie down and rise up, go out and come in, in peace and safety. What a wonderful mercy, in such a world as this, when so many are suffering and falling around us, and we, though upon the same field of battle, remain unhurt!

The calendar tells me that if I live until next Monday, I shall enter my seventy-sixth year. I believe you will pray for me on that day. My eyes, ears, and legs likewise admonish me that I grow older. My writing days seem almost over, as I cannot see well to write; but I

make an effort to send you one letter more, which may probably be the last you will receive.

I have requested your prayers; shall I tell you what to ask for? You need not pray for my sudden death, for I have as little reason as most people to be weary of life, and, through mercy, I feel at present quite willing to live my appointed time. Nor need you pray for my long continuance here, for I see little except my profession and ministry worth living for another day. But pray that I may be enabled to leave the *time* and *manner* of my death entirely in the Lord's hand. That if he sees fit to summon me suddenly, I may be willing to go without delay; and that if he is pleased to lay me aside, I may be as willing to retire and wait his time.

Pray likewise for me, that no gross imprudence or misconduct may *stain* the latter part of my life — but that I may be enabled to exemplify in myself what I have labored to inculcate upon others from the pulpit. I have observed in some good men and good ministers, improprieties in their latter days, which I have been willing to ascribe rather to the *infirmities of old age*, than to a defect in real grace. I pray daily to be preserved from these, and I request your assistance. I have known good men, in advanced life, to be garrulous, peevish, dogmatic, self-important, with some symptoms of jealousy, and perhaps envy, toward those who are upon the increase — while they feel themselves decreasing. Do, my friend, pray earnestly that it may not be so with me — but that I may retire, if laid aside, like a thankful guest from a plentiful table, and may rejoice to see others coming forward to serve the Lord, (I hope better and more successfully,) when I can serve him no longer. May I never forget that the Lord brought me from Africa, where I was the slave — the scorn, and the pity of black slaves — what he has done for me since, and what a long and highly favored day I have had since he

was pleased to put me into the ministry. Such likewise shall be my desire and prayer for you, if you should be spared to old age; for as yet I consider you rather as a youngish man.

I know, what as yet you know not, that the loss of a good wife, after a connection of many endeared years, can only be made up by the Lord himself. But when he removed mine, he left one in Miss Catlett, the best substitute the nature of the case would admit. Her tenderness and attention make my heart shrink sometimes, when I think what a trial she will have if it should be her lot to close my eyes. Do join me in prayer for her, that He to whom all things are easy, may give her strength according to her day.

Give our love to Mrs. Bull, brother Thomas, and all who are dear to you. Love to Miss Neale, Mrs. Tipgin, and more than I can name, who come often to visit. I shall expect to hear from you likewise.

The Lord bless you and yours, in body, soul, and spirit. Amen.

I am your affectionate and obliged

John Newton

Aug. 1st, 1800.

My dear friend,

My head, hands, and heart have been so full, that I could not write when I wished. I can answer your kind inquiries about my dear Eliza in few words. Her present state is very similar to dear Mr. Cowper's during the first two or three years of his illness. She is in a deep melancholy, and her distress is probably aggravated by the dreadful

suggestions of that enemy who, when he is permitted, is always ready to worry those whom he may not destroy. In all that concerns herself she is quite deranged; but I thank the Lord she is mild and quiet, and can pay some attention to what passes around her. She expects to die every hour, though her bodily health is not amiss; and she thinks that the moment after death will sink her into the pit without hope, for that all her religious profession was but hypocrisy, and that now the Lord had detected her, and cast her off forever.

Do you ask how I feel for her and myself? Through mercy, I can say, Though cast down, not destroyed. My trial is great — but the all-sufficient Lord is my support. I am sure this *affliction* did not spring out of the ground. I trust the outcome will be to his glory and our good. I am enabled to preach as usual, and when thus employed, I am helped in a good measure to leave my own personal cares behind me for the time, though they often return with weight when the service is ended.

How often have I made a surrender of myself and my all to the Lord? How often have I aimed to say, I hope with sincerity: *Lord, when, and where, and what you will!* He is now pleased to take me at my word. I have told many that the post of trial, if supported in a right spirit, as befits a sinner and a believer, is a post of honor. This honor is now assigned to me. May his grace be sufficient for me! May he give me strength according to my day! I humbly hope he will; and then the *hard* — will be easy, and the *bitter bud* — will produce a sweet flower. He has designs by this dispensation, which, though beyond my reach, I am sure must be worthy of his wisdom and love. I am a short-sighted creature; I cannot tell what worse things this trial may prevent, or what blessings it may produce. My chief desire for myself is, that He may preserve me from dishonoring my profession by despondence, impatience, or any wrong tempers.

I scarcely know a person of her years, who has given more satisfactory, uniform, and abiding proofs of a real state of grace, than my dear child. Her walk has long been not only unblamably — but highly *exemplary*. About a month before this awful gloom overwhelmed her, though she was then very disconsolate, the Lord was pleased suddenly to break in upon her mind with such power, light, and love, as she said she had never before experienced, nor ever expected. Then her apprehensions of dying were overborne, and she was heartily willing, had such been the Lord's pleasure, to have gone home. Though short, it was a precious view. It lasted but about a quarter of an hour. Now, she says it was a delusion. But it was a cordial to me, as showing me how easily and quickly the Lord can say to the troubled mind, 'Peace, be still!'

For His time, which must be the best time, I am now to wait. You and yours, I know, will pray that I may be enabled to wait with faith, hope, patience, and resignation. I trust all will be well at last, and if so, all must be well now.

I believe either you or my good friend, Mr. Thomas, have seen dear Mr. Ring's cottage. It is a delightful spot. There my dear Eliza is under the care of faithful Dr. Crabb. There she has every advantage that fine air, extensive prospects, convenient walks, and the best medical advice can afford; and there she must be for a season, until we see more of the Lord's will. She is in safe hands.

I could write on, (though my eyes are very weak;) but Mr. Ring wants to write on the other side. A letter from you now would be great charity. Collect all the prayers for us that you can; and may the Lord bless you and yours, in your heart, house, ministry, and make you a blessing to many. My warm love to you all.

I am your affectionate and obliged

John Newton

20th May, 1801.

My dear friend,

At length I have the pleasure of a letter from you to answer. My poor weak eyes will try to thank you for it — but they cannot allow me to write much at one sitting.

I have paid three visits to my dearest Eliza. The first was an interesting interview indeed. But I trust the Lord was with us. We behaved pretty well. We were mutually afraid of overdoing each other. This suppressed, in a measure, many emotions on both sides, for I had not seen her for about eight months. The second and third time we were calm. Her derangement still continues — but my great trial is alleviated by many mercies. The horrors which once overwhelmed her mind are removed. She long thought that the Lord had detected and would punish her as a hypocrite, and that death, which she hourly expected, would sink her down to be a companion with Judas.

But, now, through mercy, when her mind is diverted from her own case, she is, in all other respects, as composed and correct as at any former time. She and her three friends are always together, and she attends the sick and distressed like a nurse; her benevolent feelings are all revived, and she goes about doing good according to her power, as she did before the storm came upon her. On the Lord's day evening, she is usually a sort of chaplain to those (of her ward) who will attend, and I suppose has sometimes a dozen hearers. To them she reads a chapter, and often throws in a word of her own by way of

explanation. She then reads a sermon, and gives out a hymn. I hope the Lord has sent her for the good of others. She has, in some cases, been very useful, as I shall tell you, if I live to see you, when you come to town. She is respected, beloved, and kindly treated by all in the house, and many of the rules of the place are dispensed with as much as possible in her favor.

Yet my *trial* is great. But I know it did not spring out of the ground. I believe not a sparrow, or even a hair from our heads, can fall without His notice. I believe that no creature can give us either pleasure or pain — but as instruments of his will; and that those who fear and love him, will, sooner or later, number their *sharpest trials* among their *chief mercies*. And, as I am well satisfied that her soul is bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord, and as I believe, though a chief sinner, I am, I trust, pardoned and accepted in the beloved — I aim to resign her and myself into his hands, and to hope that all will work for his glory and our final benefit. He has made me in a degree willing — but I find the flesh is weak. But this he knows likewise. He knows what I feel, and, through mercy, I am supported, though not by sensible comforts, or lively frames. But I am enabled to trust in his written Word.

It is some addition to my trial, that I cannot fill up my time with writing and reading as formerly. But he knows this also; and should I be quite blind, I ought to be thankful that I had the use of them seventy-six years, and not to complain that they failed at last. Lord, I and all I have is yours. You can take nothing away — but what you first gave.

My memory, likewise, is so faint, that I often forget what I said or did two hours before. Yet it seldom fails me when in the pulpit, or when expounding in the houses of my friends. Perhaps I never preached

longer, louder, or more frequently than at present. Perhaps I was never heard with more attention or acceptance. (Phillip, 1:29.) If he enables me to suffer as a Christian, this post of trial may be a post of honor, and may encourage others in their affliction to trust in him when they see his faithfulness and goodness in my case. He does, he will do, all things well. May I say from my heart, Not my will — but your be done.

Mr. Raban's death seems to have been very sudden. I should like to hear more about it. I have written to his widow. May we be always ready.

Love to Mrs. Bull, to brother Thomas, to your students, and to all who love the Savior. My eyes have let me run on longer than I expected. Perhaps because I am writing to you. I am, indeed.

Your very affectionate and obliged,

John Newton

4th June, 1802.

My dear friend,

If my eyes will give me permission, I must thank you, however briefly, for your very kind letter of the third. As my anniversary was on a Wednesday, I preached about *Mr. Self*, from the case of the demoniac in Mark 5, which so nearly resembled my own, and particularly from verses 18, 19.

I am now two days into my seventy-eighth year. My *health* and *strength* are remarkable for my age; but I feel some symptoms of

declining years. The day of *opportunity* wears away, and the *night* is approaching when no man can work. But while the Lord enables me to preach, and the people are attentive and willing to hear me in my poor broken way — I ought to be willing to live to the age of Methuselah, if I might but promote his glory, and be any way *useful* to my hearers. I am bought with a price; consequently, I am not my own. I wish to say from my heart, *Lord, grant that the short uncertain remnant of my time may not discredit my profession, by pride or any evil tempers; and that when the summons shall come, it shall find me ready and waiting to go.* To this purpose I have been permitted and encouraged to pray for many years past, and our God is a hearer of prayer.

My dear child joins with me in love to you and yours, and in thanks for your kind prayers and wishes on our joint behalf. I have much to be thankful for on her account. The Lord has done great things for us, and I am waiting and praying for complete relief. But, however he may dispose of us while here, I am sure that he does all things well, and that *his choice* for us will be eventually better than anything we can choose for ourselves. If there is any alteration since you saw her, I think it is for the better, and I am not without hope that a full deliverance is gradually approaching; but I trust we are both under the direction of infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, and there I would leave it, and say, (Oh that I may say it from my heart!) Not my will — but may yours be done!

Now my eyes bid me hasten to a close. The Lord bless you, in your person, family, and ministry, and return you sevenfold into your own bosom, all that you have desired and prayed for us. Love to Mrs. Bull. Brother Thomas Bull made us a kind and very acceptable visit yesterday, an hour and a half long.

I am your very affectionate,

John Newton

5th August, 1802.

(Editor's note: Miss Catlett, after this, returned home, gradually recovered, and was, some time previous to Mr. Newton's death, married to Mr. Smith.)

My very dear Bull,

You will not expect me to write much; but I must tell you that I have seen your letter to Mrs. Neale. It awakened my most tender sympathy for you and yours, and my concern was mingled with joy to find the Lord so graciously supported you. Faithful is he who has promised.

For lack of eyes, I refer you to Matthew 7:24-27, which occurred in my reading this morning. How shall the house upon the rock be proved to be upon a sure foundation, if it was not assaulted by the same rain, storms, and floods which swept away that which was built upon the sand?

I could fill the sheet — if I could see; but I cannot. My dear Miss Catlett cordially joins in all that I mean, when I subscribe myself, your affectionate and sympathizing friend and brother,

John Newton

9th March, 1804.

Time — how short! Eternity — how long!

Eight letters to a Christian friend

Letter 1

July, 1764.

My dear Madam,

The spiritual *conflict* which you express, is inseparable from a spiritual acquaintance with our own hearts. I would not wish you to be less affected with a sense of indwelling sin. It befits us to be humbled into the dust—yet our grief, though it cannot be too great, may be under a wrong direction; and if it leads us to impatience or distrust, it certainly is so.

Sin is the *sickness of the soul*, in itself mortal and incurable, as to any power in heaven or earth—but that of the Lord Jesus only. But he is the great, the infallible Physician. Have we the privilege to know his salvation? Have we been enabled to put ourselves into his hand? Then we have then no more to do but to attend his prescriptions, to be satisfied with his methods, and to wait his time.

It is lawful to wish we were well; it is natural to groan, being burdened—but still *he* must and will take his own course with us; and, however dissatisfied with ourselves, we ought still to be thankful that he has begun his work in us, and to believe that he will also complete it. Therefore while we mourn—we should likewise rejoice! We should encourage ourselves to expect all that he has promised; and we should *limit our expectations by his promises*.

We are sure, that when the Lord delivers us from the *guilt* and *dominion* of sin, he could with equal ease free us entirely from sin—if he pleased. The doctrine of sinless perfection is not to be rejected, as though it were a thing simply impossible in itself, for nothing is too

hard for the Lord—but because it is *contrary to that method which he has chosen to proceed by*. He has appointed that sanctification should be effected, and sin mortified, not at *once* completely—but little by little; and doubtless he has wise reasons for it. Therefore, though we are to desire a growth in grace, we should, at the same time, acquiesce in his appointment, and not be discouraged or despond, because we feel that *conflict* which his Word informs us will only terminate with our lives.

Again, some of the first prayers which the Spirit of God teaches us to put up, are for a clearer sense of the sinfulness of sin, and our vileness on account of it. Now, if the Lord is pleased to answer your prayers in this respect, though it will afford you cause enough for humiliation—yet it should be received likewise with thankfulness, as a token for good. *Your heart is not worse than it was formerly—only your spiritual knowledge is increased*. And this is no small part of the growth in grace, which you are thirsting after—to be truly humbled, and emptied, and made little in your own eyes.

Further, the examples of the saints recorded in Scripture prove (and indeed of the saints in general), that the greater measure any person has of the grace of God in truth, the more conscientious and lively they have been, and the more they have been favored with assurances of the Divine favor—so much the more deep and sensible, is their *perception of indwelling sin and infirmity*. So it was with Job, Isaiah, Daniel, and Paul.

It is likewise common to overcharge ourselves. Indeed *we cannot think ourselves worse than we really are!* Yet some things which abate the *comfort* and *alacrity* of our Christian profession, are rather *impediments* than properly *sinful*, and will not be imputed to us by Him who knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust.

Thus, to have an infirm memory; or to be subject to disordered, irregular, or depressed spirits—are faults of the constitution, in which the heart and will has no share; though they are all oppressive, and sometimes needlessly so, by our charging ourselves with guilt on their account. The same may be observed of the unspeakable and fierce temptations of Satan, with which some people are pestered—but which shall be laid to him from whom they proceed, and not to them who are troubled and terrified because they are forced to feel them.

Lastly, it is by the experience of these evils within ourselves, and by feeling our utter insufficiency, either to perform duty or to withstand our enemies—that the Lord takes occasion to show us the suitableness, the sufficiency, the freeness, the unchangeableness of his power and grace! This is the inference Paul draws from his conflicts; and he learned it upon a trying occasion from the Lord's own mouth, 2 Corinthians 12:8-9.

Let us then, dear madam, be thankful and cheerful! And while we take shame to ourselves—let us glorify God, by giving Jesus the honor due to his name. Though we are poor—he is rich. Though we are weak—he is strong. Though we have nothing—he possesses all things. He suffered for us. He calls us to be conformed to him in sufferings. He conquered in his own person, and he will make each of his members more than conquerors in due season.

It is good to have *one eye* upon ourselves—but the other should always be fixed on him who is our Savior, Husband, Sustainer, and Shepherd. In *him*—we have righteousness, peace, and power. He can control all that we fear; so that if our path should be through the fire or through the water, neither the flood shall drown us, nor the flame kindle upon us! Before long he will cut short our conflicts, and say,

'Come up higher!' "Then shall our grateful songs abound—and every fear be wiped away." Having such promises and assurances, let us lift up our banner in his name, and press on through every discouragement.

With regard to **company** which has not a savor of the best things: As it is not your choice, I would advise you (when necessary) to bear it as a cross. We cannot suffer by being where we ought to be, except through our own impatience; and I have an idea, that when we are providentially called among such (for something is due to *friends* and *relations*, whether they walk with us or not), that the hours need not be wholly lost. Nothing can come to us—which man not be improved; the most trivial conversation may afford us new views of the heart, new confirmation of Scripture, and renew a sense of our obligations to sovereign and distinguishing grace, which has made us in any degree to differ from the ones who are visiting us.

I would wish when you go among your friends, that you do not confine your views to getting safely away from them *without loss*—but entertain a hope that you may be sent to *do some of them good*. You cannot tell what effect a *word* or a *look* may have—if the Lord is pleased to bless it. I think we may humbly hope, that while we sincerely desire to please the Lord, and to be guided by him in all things—he will not allow us to take a journey, or hardly to make a short visit—which shall not answer some good purpose to ourselves or others, or both!

While your mirthful friends affect an *air of raillery*, the Lord may give you a secret witness in their consciences; and something they observe in you, or hear from you—may set them on thinking perhaps after you are gone, or after the first occasion has entirely slipped your

memory, "Cast your bread upon the waters—for after many days you will find it again." Ecclesiastes 11:1.

For my own part, when I consider the power, the freedom of Divine grace, and holy sovereignty of the Lord in the choice of the instruments and means by which he is pleased to work—I live in hopes from day to day of hearing of wonders of this sort. I despair of nobody's salvation! And if I sometimes am ready to think such or such a person seems more *unlikely* than others to be brought in, I relieve myself by a possibility that that very person, and for that very reason—may be the first saved! The Lord's thoughts are not like ours. In his love and in his ways there are heights which we cannot reach, depths which we cannot fathom, lengths and breadths beyond the range of our feeble sight. Let us then simply depend upon Him, and do our *little best*—leaving the event in his hand!

In a letter I received from Mrs. **** yesterday, she writes thus: "I am at present very ill with some disorder in my throat, which seems to threaten my life—but death or life, things present or things to come—all things are mine, and I am Christ's! O glorious privilege! precious foundation of soul-rest and peace, when all things concerning us are most troublous! Soon we shall be at home with Christ, where sin, sorrow, and death have no place! In the mean time, our Beloved will lead us through the wilderness. How safe, how joyous are we—in the most dire case!"

If these should be some of the last notes of this 'swan', I think them worth preserving. May the Lord grant that you and I, madam, may be happy in the same assurance, when we shall have death and eternity near in view!

Letter 2

Sept. 1764.

My dear Madam,

Your *welfare* I rejoice in; your *warfare* I understand something of. Paul describes his own case in few words, "*Conflicts on the outside, fears on the inside.*" Does not this comprehend all you would say? And how are you to know experimentally either your own weakness—or the power, wisdom, and grace of God, seasonably and sufficiently afforded—but by frequent and various trials? How are the *graces* of patience, resignation, meekness, and faith, to be discovered and increased—but by exercise? The Lord has chosen, called, and armed us for the fight; and shall we wish to be excused from the battle? Shall we not rather rejoice that we have the honor to appear in such a cause, under such a Captain, such a banner, and in such company? A complete suit of *armor* is provided, formidable *weapons*, and precious balm to heal us—if we receive a wound, and precious *cordials* to revive us—when we are in danger of fainting!

Further, we are assured of the victory beforehand; and, O what a crown is prepared for every conqueror, which Jesus, the righteous Judge, the gracious Savior—shall place upon every faithful head with his own hand!

So let us not be weary and faint, for in due season we shall reap! The time is short—yet in a little while, the struggle of indwelling sin, and all the conflicts surrounding us, shall be known no more! "Be faithful, even to the point of death—and I will give you the crown of life!" Revelation 2:10

You are blessed, because you hunger and thirst after righteousness. He whose name is Amen has said you shall be filled. To claim the promise—is to make it our own; yet it is befitting for us to practice

submission and *patience*, not in temporal things only—but also in spiritual things. We should be ashamed and grieved at our slow progress, so far as it is properly chargeable to our faults and failures. Yet we must not expect to receive everything at once—but wait for a gradual increase; nor should we forget to be thankful for what we may account *a little*, in comparison of the *much* we suppose others have received. A little grace, a spark of true love to God, a grain of living faith, though small as mustard-seed—is worth a thousand worlds! One draught of the *water of life* gives a saving interest in, and pledge of, the whole fountain!

It befits the Lord's people to be thankful. To acknowledge his goodness in what we have received—is the surest, as well as the pleasantest method of obtaining more. Nor should the grief, arising from the evils which we know and feel of our own hearts, rob us of the honor, comfort, and joy, which the Word of God designs for us, in what is there recorded of the person, offices, and grace of Jesus, and the relations he is pleased to stand in to his people. Psalm 23:1; Isaiah 54:5; Son. 5:16; John 15:15; 1Jo. 2:1; John 15:1; Jer. 23:15; 1Co. 1:30; Mat. 1:21-23. Give me permission to recommend to your consideration Psalm 139:15-18. These verses may be *called the Believer's Triumph*. Though they are nothing in themselves—yet having all in Jesus, they may rejoice in his name all the day. May the Lord enable us so to do! The joy of the Lord is the strength of his people. But *unbelief* makes our hands hang down, and our knees feeble, dispirits ourselves, and discourages others; and though it steals upon us under a *semblance of humility*, it is indeed the very *essence of pride*.

By inward and outward trials, the Lord is promoting the best desire of your heart, and answering your daily prayers. Would you have *assurance*? True solid assurance is to be obtained no other way.

When young Christians are greatly comforted with the Lord's love and presence, their doubts and fears are for that season at an end. But this is not assurance; so soon as the Lord hides his face they are troubled, and ready to question the very foundation of hope. Assurance grows by *repeated conflict*, by our repeated experimental proof of the Lord's power and goodness to save. When we have been brought very low and divinely helped; sorely wounded and divinely healed; cast down and divinely raised again; have given up all hope, and been suddenly snatched from danger, and placed in safety; and when these things have been repeated *to* us and *in* us a thousand times over—we begin to learn to trust simply to the Word and power of God, beyond and against appearances; and this trust, when habitual and strong, bears the name of *assurance*; for even assurance has *degrees*.

You have good reason, madam, to suppose, that the love of the best Christians to an unseen Savior—is far short of what it ought to be. If your heart is like mine, and you examine your love to Christ by the warmth and frequency of your emotions towards him—you will often be in a sad suspense whether or not you love him at all. The best mark to judge, and which he has given us for that purpose, is to inquire if his Word and Will have a prevailing, governing influence upon our lives and temper. If we truly love him—we do endeavor to keep his commandments. If we have a desire to please him—we undoubtedly love him. *Obedience is the best test*; and when, amidst all our imperfections, we can humbly appeal to God concerning the sincerity of our hearts, this is a mercy for which we ought to be greatly thankful. He who has brought us to desire—will likewise enable us to obey, according to his good pleasure.

I doubt not but the Lord whom you love, and on whom you depend, will lead you in a sure way, and establish and strengthen and settle

you in his love and grace. Indeed he has done great things for you already. "The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need!" Psalm 23:1. The Lord is your *Shepherd!* This is a comprehensive word. The sheep can do nothing for themselves. The Shepherd must guide, guard, feed, heal, recover. It is well for us—that our Shepherd is the Lord Almighty! If his power, care, compassion, fullness, were not infinite—the poor sheep would be forsaken, starved, and die! But we have a Shepherd full of care, full of kindness, full of power, who has said, "I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak!" Ezekiel 34:16. How tender are these expressions, and how well fulfilled! His sheep feed in the midst of wolves—yet are safely preserved; for, though they cannot see him—his eye and his heart are upon them!

Do we wonder that Daniel was preserved in the lion's den? Why, it is a common case.

Which of God's children have not cause to say, "My soul is among lions!" But our Shepherd stops their mouths, or only permits them to gape and roar, and show their teeth! He does not allow them to bite and tear us at their own will. Let us trust our Shepherd—and all shall be well.

As to daily occurrences, it is best to trust that a daily portion of comforts and crosses—each one the most suitable to our case—is adjusted and appointed by the hand which was once nailed to the cross for us! We must trust, that where the path of duty and prudence leads us—that there is the best situation we could possibly be in at that time. We are not required to chasten ourselves immoderately for what is not in our power to prevent, nor should

anything that affords occasions for mortifying the spirit of self, be accounted unnecessary.

Letter 3

1768.

Dear friend,

I have been hoping some time to hear from you—but an acquaintance informed me that you were ill. This news prompted me to write as soon as I could find leisure. The Lord has seen fit to visit you with much sickness of late; I say He has seen fit, for all our trials are under his immediate direction, and we are never in heaviness without a needs-be. I trust he does and will give you strength equal to your day, and sweeten what would be otherwise bitter—with the essence of his precious love. I hope soon to hear that you are restored to health, and that you have found cause to praise him for his loving rod.

How happy is the state of a believer, to have a sure promise that all shall work together for good in the end; and in the mean time, he has a sure refuge where to find present relief, support, and protection! How comfortable is it, when trouble is near, to know that the Lord is near likewise, and to commit ourselves and all our cares simply to him, believing that his *eye* is upon us, and his *ear* is open to our prayers. Under the conduct of such a Shepherd, we need not fear. Though we are called to pass through fire and water, through the valley of the shadow of death—he will be with us, and will show himself mighty on our behalf.

It seems almost needless to say, that we were very happy in the company of ****. The only inconvenience was, that it renewed the pain it always gives me to *part* with them. Though the visit was as

long as I could possibly expect, it seemed very short. This must be the case while we are here—our earthly *pleasures are short, interrupted, and mixed with troubles*. This world is not, and cannot be our rest. But it will not be always the case. We are traveling to a better world, where every evil and imperfection shall cease; then we shall be forever with the Lord, and with each other. May the prospect of this blessed hope revive our fainting spirits, and make us willing to endure hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ! Here we must often sow in tears—but there we shall reap in joy, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes forever.

I hope the conversation of friends whom I so greatly love and honor, afforded me not only *pleasure* but *profit*. It left a savor upon my mind, and stirred up my languid desires after the Lord. I wish I could say the good effect has remained with me to this hour—but, alas! I am a poor creature, and have had many causes of humiliation since. But, blessed be God! amidst all my changes—I find the foundation stands sure; and I am seldom or never left to doubt either of the Lord's love to me—or the reality of the desires he has given me towards himself. Though when I measure my love by the degree of its exercise, or the fruits it produces, I have reason to sit down ashamed as the chief of sinners and the least of all saints. But in Him I have righteousness and peace, and in Him I must and will rejoice!

I would willingly fill up my sheet—but feel a straitness in my spirit, and know not what further to say. O for a ray of Divine light to set me at liberty, that I might write a few lines worth reading, something that might warm my heart, and comfort yours! Then the subject must be Jesus—but of him what can I say that you do not know? Well, though you know him, you are glad to hear of him again and again. Come then, magnify the Lord with me—and let us exalt his name together. Let us adore him for his love, that love which has a

height, and depth, and length, and breadth, beyond the grasp of our poor conceptions; a love that moved him to empty himself, to take on him the form of a servant, and to be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; a love that pitied us in our lost estate, that found us when we sought him not; a love that spoke peace to our souls in the day of our distress; a love that bears with all our present weakness, mistakes, backslidings, and shortcomings; a love that is always watchful, always ready to guide, to comfort, and to heal; a love that will not be wearied, cannot be conquered, and is incapable of changes; a love that will in the end prevail over all opposition, will perfect that which concerns us, and will not leave us until it has brought us perfect in holiness and happiness, to rejoice in his presence in glory.

The love of Christ! it is the wonder, the joy, the song of angels; and the sense of it shed abroad in our hearts makes life pleasant and death welcome. Alas! what a heart have I—that I love him no better! But I hope he has given me a desire to make him my all in all, and to account everything loss and dross, which dares to stand in competition with him.

Letter 4

1769.

Dear friend,

I heard of your being laid on the bed of affliction, and of the Lord's goodness to you there, and of His raising you up again. Blessed be His name! He is all-sufficient and faithful; and though He causes grief, He is sure to show compassion in supporting and delivering.

Ah! the evil of our nature is deeply rooted and very powerful—or such repeated, continual corrections and chastisements would not be

necessary! And were they not necessary, we would not have them. But such we are—and therefore such must be our treatment. For though the Lord loves us with a tenderness beyond what the mother feels for her nursing child—yet it is a tenderness directed by Infinite Wisdom, and very different from that weak indulgence which in parents we call fondness, which leads them to comply with their children's desires and inclinations, rather than to act with a steady view to their true welfare.

The Lord loves His children, and is very indulgent to them so far as they can safely bear it—but He will not spoil them! Their sin-sickness requires strong medicines, some of which are very unpalatable. But when the case calls for such, no short-sighted entreaties of ours can excuse us from taking what He prepares for our good. But every dose is prepared by His own hand, and not one is administered in vain, nor is it repeated any oftener than is absolutely needful to answer His purposed end. Until then, no other hand can remove what He lays upon us. But when His merciful design is answered, He will relieve us Himself; and in the mean time He will so moderate the operation, or increase our ability to bear up—that we shall not be overpowered.

It is true, without a single exception, that all His paths are mercy and truth, to those who fear Him. His love is the same, when He wounds—as when He heals; when He takes away—as when He gives. we have reason to thank Him for all—but most for His loving corrections and chastisements.

I received a letter from you which mentions dear Mrs. ****'s case, a very trying one—but in this likewise, we see the Lord's faithfulness. Our own experience, and all that we observe of his dealings with others—may convince us that we need not be afraid to entrust

ourselves and our dearest concerns in his hands; for he can and will make everything work for good.

How little does the world know, of that sweet fellowship which is carried on between heaven and earth; what petitions are daily presented, and what answers are received at the Throne of Grace! O the blessed privilege of prayer! O the wonderful love, care, attention, and power of our great Shepherd! His *eye* is always upon us! When our spirits are almost overwhelmed within us—he knows our path. His *ear* is always open to us. No matter who will overlook and disappoint us—he will not. When means and hope fail, when everything looks dark upon us, when we seem shut up on every side, when we are brought to the lowest ebb—still our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth! To him all things are possible; and before the exertion of his power, when he is pleased to arise and work, all hindrances give way and vanish, like a mist before the sun. And he can so manifest himself to the soul, and cause his goodness to pass before it, that the *hour of affliction* shall be the golden hour of the greatest *consolation*.

He is the fountain of life, strength, grace and comfort—and of his fullness his children receive according to their needs. But this is all hidden from the world; they have no guide in *prosperity*—but hurry on as they are instigated by their blinded passions, and are perpetually multiplying mischiefs and miseries to themselves! And in *adversity* they have no resource—but must feel all the evil of affliction, without inward support, and without deriving any advantage from it. We have therefore cause for continual praise. The Lord has given us to know his name as a resting-place and a hiding-place, a sun and a shield. *Circumstances* and *creatures* may change—but *he* will be an unchangeable friend. The way is rough—but he trod it before us, and is now with us in every step we take; and every

step brings us nearer to our heavenly home. Our inheritance is surely reserved for us, and we shall be kept for it by his power through faith. Our present strength is small, and without a fresh supply, we would be quickly exhausted—but he has engaged to renew it from day to day; and he will soon appear to wipe all tears from our eyes; and then we shall appear with him in glory!

I am very sorry if our friend Mr. **** appears to be aiming to reconcile things that are incompatible. I am indeed afraid that he has been for some time under a spiritual decline; and, as you justly observe, we meet with too many instances to teach us, that many of those who express the warmest zeal at their first setting out in the Christian race—do not always prove the most steady and thriving afterwards. Yet I am willing to hope, in this case, that he will revive and flourish again. Sometimes the Lord permits those whom he loves to wander from him for a season. And when his time comes to heal their backslidings—they walk more humbly, thankfully, and fruitfully afterwards—from a sense of his abounding mercy, and the knowledge they have by experience acquired of the deceitfulness and ingratitude of their hearts. I hope and pray it will be so with him. However, these things for the present are grievous; and usually, before the Lord heals such breaches, he makes his people sensible, that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake him when he led them by the way.

Indeed *London* is a dangerous and ensnaring place to professors. I account myself happy that my lot is cast at a distance from it. It appears to me like a sea, wherein most are tossed by storms, and many suffer shipwreck. In this retired situation, I seem to stand upon a cliff; and, while I pity those whom I cannot help, I comfort myself in the thoughts of being safe upon the shore. Not that we are without our trials here; the evil of our own hearts, and the devices of Satan,

cut us out work enough—but we are happily screened from many things which must be either burdensome or hurtful to those who live in the way of them; such as political disputes, winds of false doctrines, scandals of false professors, parties for and against particular ministers, and fashionable amusements, in some measure countenanced by the presence of people in other respects exemplary.

In this view, I often think of our dear friend's expression, upon a certain occasion, of the difference between *London* grace—and *country* grace. I hold it in a twofold sense. By **London grace**, when genuine, I understand grace in a very advanced degree. The favored few who are kept alive to God, simple-hearted, and spiritually minded in the midst of such snares and temptations, appear to me to be the first-rate Christians of the land. I adore the power of the Lord in them, and compare them to the young men who walked unhurt in the midst of the fire. In another sense, the phrase London grace conveys no great idea to me. I think there is no place in the kingdom where a person may set up for a professor upon a smaller stock of grace. If people can abstain from open immoralities, if they will fly to all parts of the town to hear sermons, if they can talk about the doctrines of the Gospel, if they have something to say upon that useless question, Who is the best preacher? if they can attain to a speaking acquaintance with other professors—then they expect to pass muster. I am afraid there are many who, upon no better evidences than these, deceive both themselves and others for a course of years.

I have almost filled the sheet of paper somehow; and if a line or a word may be a means of suggesting a seasonable and comfortable thought to you, I have my end. Through mercy, we are all pretty well. My soul is kept alive as it were by miracle. I feel much inward warfare; the enemy thrusts sore at me, that I may fall; and I have

abundant experience of the evil and deceitfulness of my heart—but the Lord is gracious, and, in the midst of all conflicts, I have a peace springing from the knowledge of his power and grace, and a consideration that I have been helped to commit myself to him.

Letter 5

1769.

Dear friend,

We are much obliged to you for your visit; and I am glad to find that the Lord is pleased to give you some tokens of his presence when you are with us, because I hope it will encourage you to come again. I ought to be very thankful that our Christian friends in general are not wholly disappointed of a blessing when they visit us.

I hope the Lord will give me an humble sense of what I am, and that broken and contrite frame of heart in which he delights. This is to me the chief thing. I had rather have more of the mind that was in Christ, more of a meek, quiet, resigned, peaceful, and loving disposition—than to enjoy the greatest measure of sensible spiritual comforts, if the consequence should be (as perhaps it would) spiritual pride, self-sufficiency, and a lack of that tenderness to others which befits one who has reason to style himself the 'chief of sinners'. I know indeed that the proper tendency of sensible consolations is to humble—but I can see, that, through the depravity of human nature, they have not always that effect. And I have been sometimes disgusted with an apparent lack of humility, an air of self-will and self-importance, in people of whose sincerity I could not at all doubt. It has kept me from envying them those pleasant frames with which they have sometimes been favored; for I believe Satan is never nearer us—than at some times when we think ourselves

nearest the Lord! What reason have we to charge our souls in David's words! "My soul, wait *only* upon God." A great stress should be laid upon that word *only*. We dare not entirely shut him out of our regards—but we are too apt to allow something else to share with him. This evil disposition is deeply fixed in our hearts; and the Lord orders all his dispensations towards us with a view to rooting it out; that, being wearied with repeated disappointments, we may at length be compelled to betake ourselves to Him alone.

Why else do we experience so many changes and crosses? why are we so often in heaviness? We know that He delights in the pleasure and prosperity of his servants; that He does not willingly *afflict* or *grieve* his children—but there is a necessity on our parts, in order to teach us that we have no stability in *ourselves*, and that no *creature* can do us good—but by His appointment.

While the people of Israel depended upon Him for food, they gathered up the manna every morning in the field—but when they would hoard it up in their houses, that they might have a stock within themselves, they had it without his blessing—and it proved good for nothing; it soon bred worms, and grew offensive. We may often observe something like this occurs, both in our temporal and spiritual concerns.

The Lord gives us a dear friend for our comfort—but before long we forget that the friend is only the *channel* of conveyance, and that all the comfort is from Himself. To remind us of this, the stream is dried up, the friend torn away by death, or removed far from us, or perhaps the friendship ceases, and a coolness insensibly takes place, we know not how or why. The true reason is, that when we rejoiced amiss in our *gourd*, the Lord, for our good, sent a *worm* to the root of it!

Instances of this kind are innumerable; and the great inference from them all is, Cease from man, cease from creatures, for wherein are they to be accounted of? My soul, wait only, only upon the Lord, who is (according to the expressive phrase, Heb. 4:13.) he with whom we have to do for soul and body, for time and eternity!

What thanks do we owe, that though we have not yet attained perfectly this great lesson—yet we are admitted into that school where alone it can be learned; and though we are poor, slow scholars—the great and effectual Teacher to whom we have been encouraged and enabled to apply, can and will bring us forward! He communicates not only *instructions*—but *capacities* and *abilities*. There is none like him! He can make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak! And how great is his condescension and patience! How does He accommodate himself to our weakness, and teach us as we are able to bear! Though all are dunces when He first receives them, not one was ever turned out as incapable. For He makes them what He would have them to be! "The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." John 14:26. "He began to teach them many things." Mark 6:34

O that we may set Him always before us, and consider every dispensation, person, thing, we meet in the course of every day, as messengers from Him, each bringing us some line of instruction for us to copy into that day's experience! Whatever passes within us or around us may be improved (when he teaches us how) as a perpetual commentary upon his good Word. If we converse and observe with this view, we may learn something every moment, wherever the path of duty leads us, in the streets as well as in the closet, and from the conversation of those who know not God (when we cannot avoid being present at it), as well as from those who do.

Separation of dear friends is, as you observed, hard to flesh and blood—but grace can make it tolerable. I have an abiding persuasion that the Lord can easily *give* more than ever he will *take* away. Which part of the alternative must be my lot, or when, he only knows—but in general I can rely on him—to appoint the time, the manner; and I trust his promise of '*strength suited to the day*' shall be made good. Therefore I can for the most part rejoice, that all things are in the hand and under the direction of him who knows our frame, and has himself borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, in his own body.

A time of *weeping* must come—but the *morning of joy* will make amends for all! Who can expound the meaning of that one expression, "An exceeding and eternal weight of glory?" The case of *unconverted* friends is still more burdensome to think of—but we have encouragement and warrant to *pray* and to *hope*. He who called *us*—can easily call *others*! And he seldom lays a desire of this sort very closely and warmly upon the hearts of his people—but when it is his gracious design, sooner or later, to give an answer of peace. However, it befits us to be thankful for ourselves, and to bow our concerns and reasonings before his sovereign will, who does as he pleases with his own.

Methinks winter is your summer. You have been, like the *bee*, collecting from many *flowers*; I hope you will carry good store of *honey* home with you. May you find the Lord there, and he can easily supply the failure of *means* and *creatures*. We cannot be in any place to so much advantage—as where the *call of duty* leads. What we cannot avoid—may we cheerfully submit to, and not indulge a vain thought that *we* could choose a better situation for ourselves (all things considered) than *he* has chosen for us!

When we have opportunity of enjoying many ordinances, it is a mercy to be able to prize and improve them—but when he cuts us short for a season, if we wait upon him, we shall do well without them. Secret prayer, and the holy Scriptures, are the *chief wells* from whence we draw the water of salvation. These will keep the soul alive when creature-streams are cut off. But the richest variety of public means, and the closest attendance upon them, will leave us lean and pining in the midst of plenty, if we are remiss and formal in the other two. I think David never appears in a more lively frame of mind—than when he wrote the 42d, 63d, and 84th Psalms, which were all penned in a dry land, and at a distance from the public ordinances!

Letter 6

1772.

Dear friend,

I can assure you of my sincere sympathy with you in your trials. I can in some measure guess at what you feel, from what I have seen and felt myself in cases where I have been similarly concerned. But my compassion, though sincere, is ineffectual. If I can pity—I cannot relieve. All I can do is, as the Lord enables me, to remember you before His throne of grace.

But there is One whose compassion is infinite! The love and tenderness of ten thousand earthly friends, of ten thousand mothers towards their nursing infants, if compared with His—are less than a drop of water, compared to the ocean!

And His power is infinite too. Why then do our sufferings continue, when He is so compassionate, and could remove them with a word? Surely, if we cannot give the particular reasons (which yet he will acquaint us with hereafter, John 13:7), the general reason is at hand.

He does not afflict us needlessly—but for our profit; to make us partakers of His holiness, and because He loves us!

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face!

I wish you much comfort from David's thought, Psalm 142:3, "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me—You knew my path." The Lord is not withdrawn to distant universe—but His eye is upon you! He does not see you with the indifference of a mere spectator—but he observes with loving attention—He knows, He considers your path. Yes, he appoints it—and every circumstance about it is under His direction! Your trouble began at the hour which He saw best—it could not come before! He has marked the degree of it, to a hair's breadth; and the duration to the minute! He knows likewise how your spirit is affected; and such supplies of grace and strength, and in such seasons as He sees needful—He will afford. Therefore, hope in God, for you shall yet praise Him!

I shall pray that the waters of the sanctuary there, may be healing and enlivening to you all. Our all-sufficient God can give seasons of refreshment in the darkest hours, and break through the thickest clouds of outward affliction or distress. To you it is given not only to believe in Jesus—but to suffer for his sake. We do so, not only when we are called to follow him to imprisonment or death—but when he enables us to bear afflictive dispensations with due submission and patience. Then he is glorified. Then his grace and power are manifested in us. Then the world, so far as they know our case, has a proof before them that our religion is not merely *notional*—but that there is a *power* and *reality* in it. And the Lord's people are

encouraged by what they see of his faithfulness to ourselves. And there are more eyes upon us still. We are a spectacle to the universe, to angels as well as to men!

Cheer up. the Lord has put you in your present trying situation, that you may have the fairer opportunity of adorning your profession of the Gospel; and though you suffer much, he is able to make you abundant amends. Nor need I remind you that he has suffered unspeakably more for you! He drank for your sake, a cup of *unmixed wrath*; and only puts into your hand—a *cup of affliction mixed with many mercies*.

The account you gave of the poor man detained in the inn was very affecting. Such scenes are or should be instructive, to teach us resignation under the trials we must meet with every day. For not only are we visited less than our *iniquities* have deserved—but much less than many of our *fellow-creatures* daily meet with. We need not look about far or long—to find others in a worse situation than ourselves! If a fit of the gout or cholic is so grievous and so hard to bear, what do we owe to him who delivered us from that place of unutterable torment, where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth forever, without hope or respite!

And if we cannot help interesting ourselves in the groans of a stranger, how ought the groans of Jesus to be as it were, continually sounding in our ears? What are all other sufferings compared to his? And yet he endured them freely. He needed not to have borne them, if he would have left us to perish—but such was his love, he died that we might live, and endured the fiercest agonies that he might open to us the gate of everlasting peace and happiness.

How amazingly perverse is my heart—that I can be more affected with a sad story in a newspaper concerning people I never saw—than

with all that I read of His bitter passion in the garden and on the cross—though I profess to believe that He endured it all for me!

Oh, if we could always behold Him by faith—as evidently crucified before our eyes—how would it compose our spirits as to all the sweets and bitters of this poor life! What a armor would it prove against all the snares and temptations whereby Satan would draw us into evil! I long for more love to Jesus—that I may be preserved humble, thankful, watchful, and dependent upon Him. To behold the glory and the love of Jesus—is the only effectual way to be changed into His image!

We are to set out tonight from the *Interpreter's house* towards the *hill Difficulty*—and hope to be favored with a sight of the *Cross* along the way. To stand at the foot of the Cross, with a softened heart and melting eyes; to forget our sins, sorrows, and burdens, while we are wholly swallowed up in the contemplation of Him who bore our sins in his own body upon the cruel tree—is certainly the most desirable situation on this side the grave. To *speak* of it, and to *see* it by the light of the Spirit, are widely different things. And though we cannot always enjoy this view—yet the remembrance of what we have seen is an excellent means of encouragement to *mount the hill*, and to *face the lions*.

I believe I shall hardly find leisure to fill my paper this time. It is now Saturday evening, and growing late. I am just returned from a serious walk, which is my usual manner of closing the week when the weather is fine. I endeavor to join in heart with the Lord's ministers and people, who are seeking a blessing on tomorrow's ordinances. At such times, I especially remember those friends with whom I have gone to the house of the Lord in company, consequently you are not forgotten. I can venture to assure you, that you have a frequent share

in our prayers; yes, are loved and remembered by many here—but as we are forgetful creatures, I hope you will always refresh our memory, and quicken our prayers, by a yearly visit.

What a multitude of eyes and hearts wait at the Throne of Grace! He has a numerous and necessitous family—but He is rich enough to supply them all—and His tender compassions extend to the poorest and most unworthy of them! Like the sun—He can cheer and enlighten millions of His poor pensioners at once! He gives to each one as bountifully—as if there were no others to partake of His favor!

His best blessings are not diminished—by being shared among many. The greatest earthly monarch would soon be poor—if he was to give but a pittance to all his subjects. But Jesus has unsearchable, inexhaustible riches of grace to bestow!

The innumerable assembly before the Eternal Throne are all continually supplied from His fullness; and yet there is enough and to spare for His earthly children also—and for all who shall come after us! May He give us an eager appetite—a hunger and thirst that will not be satisfied with anything short of the Bread of Life. We may confidently open our mouths wide—for He has promised to fill them! "Let us therefore approach the Throne of Grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need!" Hebrews 4:16

Letter 7

1773.

Dear friend,

Since I wrote last, the Lord has been gracious to us here. He crowned the last year with his goodness, and renews his benefits to us every

day. He has been pleased to bless the preaching of his Gospel among us, both to consolation and conviction; and several are, I hope, earnestly seeking him, who were lately dead in trespasses and sins.

Dear Mr. **** was *released from all his illnesses* on the 25th of November. A few days before his *death*, he was enabled to speak more intelligibly than usual for about a quarter of an hour, and expressed a comfortable hope, which was a great satisfaction to us; for though we had not the least doubt of his being built upon the Rock, it was to us an answer to prayer that he could again speak the language of faith; and much prayer had been made on this account, especially that very evening. After that night he spoke little—but continued chiefly drowsy until he died. I preached his funeral sermon from Lam. 3:31-33.

Mrs. L****'s illness grows worse and worse. she *suffers* much in her body, and has much more perhaps to suffer—but her *consolations* in the Lord abound. He enables her to maintain faith, patience, and submission, in an exemplary manner; and shows us, in his dealings with her, that he is all-sufficient and faithful to those who put their trust in him.

I am glad to hear that you had comfortable seasons while at Bath. It is indeed a great mercy, that God's ordinances are established in that place of dissipation; and I hope many who go there with no higher view than to drink the *Bath waters*, will be brought to draw with joy the waters of life from those wells of salvation. He does nothing in vain; and when he affords the means, we may confidently hope he will bestow the blessing.

The lowness of spirituality which you complain of, when you are in a strange place, is, I suppose, felt by most, if not by all, who can be satisfied in no place without some token of the Lord's presence. I

consider it rather as an *infirmity* than a sin, strictly speaking; though all our infirmities are sinful, being the effects of a depraved nature. In our present circumstances, new things excite new ideas; and when our usual course of life is broken in upon, it disjoins and unsettles our thoughts. It is a proof of our weakness. It may and ought to be lamented—but I believe we shall not get the better of it, until we leave the mortal body to molder into dust!

Perhaps few suffer more inconvenience from this particular than myself; which is one reason why I love home, and seldom leave it without some reluctance. And it is one reason why we should love heaven, and long for the hour when, at liberty from all encumbrance, we shall see the Lord without a veil, and serve him without distraction!

The Lord, by his providence, seconds and confirms the declarations of his Word and ministry. *We read and know much concerning the emptiness, vanity, and uncertainty of the present state.* When our minds are enlightened by his Holy Spirit, we receive and acknowledge what his Word declares to be truth. Yet if we remain long without *changes* and *trials*, and our path is very *smooth*—we are for the most part but faintly affected with what we profess to believe. But when some of our dearest friends are taken from us, the lives of others threatened, and we ourselves are brought low with pain and sickness, then we not only *say*—but *feel* that this world must not, cannot be our rest! You have had several exercises of this kind of late in your family; and I trust you will be able to set your seal to that gracious word, That though afflictions in themselves are not joyous—but grievous—yet in due season they yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness.

Various and blessed are the fruits which afflictions produce. By affliction prayer is quickened, for our prayers are very apt to grow languid and formal in a time of ease. Affliction greatly helps us to understand the Scriptures, especially the promises; most of which being made to *times of trouble*. We cannot so well know their fullness, sweetness, and certainty, as when we have been in the situation to which they are suited, have been enabled to trust and plead them, and found them fulfilled in our own case. We are usually indebted to affliction—as the means or occasion of the most signal discoveries we are favored with of the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of the Lord. These are best observed by the evident proofs we have that he is near to support us under trouble, and that he can and does deliver us out of it. Israel would not have seen so much of the Lord's arm outstretched in their behalf, had not Pharaoh oppressed, opposed, and pursued them.

Afflictions are designed likewise for the manifestation of our sincerity to ourselves and to others. When faith endures the fire, we know it to be of the right kind; and others, who see we are brought safe out, and lose nothing but the dross, will confess that God is with us of a truth; Dan. 3:27-28. Surely this thought should reconcile us to suffer, not only with *patience* but with *cheerfulness*—if God may be glorified in us. This made the Apostle rejoice in tribulation, that the power of Christ might be noticed, as resting upon him, and working mightily in him.

Many of our graces likewise cannot thrive or manifest themselves, without trials—such as resignation, patience, meekness, long-suffering. I observe some of the London porters do not appear to be very strong men—yet they will trudge along under a burden which some stouter people could not carry so well. The reason is, that they are accustomed to carry burdens, and by continual exercise their

shoulders acquire a strength suited to their work. It is so in the Christian life. Activity and strength of grace is not ordinarily acquired by those who sit still and live at ease—but by those who frequently meet with something which requires a full exertion of what power the Lord has given them.

So again, it is by our own sufferings, that we learn to pity and sympathize with others in their sufferings. Such a compassionate disposition, which excites our feelings for the afflicted, is an eminent branch of the mind which was in Christ. But these feelings would be very faint, if we did not in our experience know what sorrows and temptations mean.

Afflictions do us good likewise, as they make us more acquainted with what is in our own hearts, and thereby promote humiliation and self-abasement. There are abominations which, like nests of vipers, lie so quietly within, that we hardly suspect they are there—until the *rod of affliction* rouses them! Then they hiss and show their venom! This discovery is indeed very distressing—yet, until it is made, we are prone to think ourselves much less vile than we really are, and cannot so heartily abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes.

But I must write a sermon rather than a letter—if I would enumerate all the good fruits which, by the power of sanctifying grace, are produced from this bitter tree of affliction! May we, under our several trials, find them all revealed in ourselves, that we may not complain of having suffered in vain. While we have such a depraved nature, and live in such a polluted world; while the roots of pride, vanity, self-dependence, self-seeking, are so strong within us; we need a variety of sharp afflictions to keep us from cleaving to the dust! "I know, O Lord, that Your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness You have afflicted me!" Psalm 119:75. "Before I was

afflicted I went astray—but now I obey Your Word." Psalm 119:67.
"God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness."
Hebrews 12:10

Letter 8

1774.

Dear friend,

The very painful illness which Mrs. **** so long endured, had doubtless not only prepared you to expect the news of her death—but made you more willing to resign her. You are bereaved of a valuable friend—but life in her circumstances was burdensome; and who can be sorry to consider her now as freed from all suffering—and possessed of all happiness? But, besides this, I trust the Lord has favored you with an habitual sense of the *wisdom* and *propriety* of all his appointments; so that when his will is manifested by the event, you are enabled to say, "All is well!" "I was silent, and opened not my mouth, because You are the one who has done this!"

She is gone a little before you; and, after a few more changes, you will meet her again to unspeakable advantage, and rejoice together before the Throne forever! There every tear will be wiped away, and you shall weep no more. The Lord could have prevented the cause of her great sufferings—but I doubt not, that he afflicted her in *wisdom* and *mercy*. He could easily have restored her to health—but the time was hastening when he purposed to have her with him—where he is, that she might behold his glory, and have all the desires he put into her heart, abundantly satisfied. Precious in his sight—is the death of his saints! Every circumstance under the direction of Infinite Wisdom. His **sovereignty** forbids us to say, "Why have you done this?" And his **love** assures us that he does all things well!

I have lost a friend likewise. I believe I may say few people, not immediately related to her, could value her more highly than myself; and though of late years I could not have the pleasure of her company, it was a constant satisfaction to me to know I had such a friend.

Her husband's sickness and death, followed immediately upon this stroke. I doubt not, but you have been much affected with this dispensation likewise. But here again we have the same *stronghold* to retreat to. The *Lord* has done it! What a pleasing prospect of increasing *usefulness* is now cut off! How many will mourn his loss! Yet we are sure the work which the Lord had appointed him was finished. They who loved his ministry, and were profited by it, are left apparently destitute—but Jesus, the good Shepherd, is able to take care of his own, and will fulfill his promise to them all. He has promised, and truly they shall be fed.

We have had *trying* and *dying* times here. Almost half of my time has been taken up with visiting the sick. I have seen death in a variety of forms, and have had frequent occasion of observing how insignificant many things, which are now capable of giving us pain or pleasure—will appear, when the soul is brought near to the borders of eternity. All the concerns which relate solely to this life, will then be found as *trivial* as the traces of a dream from which we are awakened! Nothing will then comfort us—but the knowledge of Jesus and his love! Nothing will then grieve us—but the remembrance of our unfaithful hearts to him, and what poor returns we made to his abundant goodness. May the Lord forbid that this thought should break our peace! No! faith in his name may forbid our fear, though we shall see and confess we have been unprofitable servants. There shall be no condemnation to those who are in him—but surely shame and humiliation *will* accompany us to the very threshold of heaven—

and *ought* to do so. I surely shall then be more affected than I am now—with the coolness of my love, the faintness of my zeal, the vanity of my heart, and my undue attachment to the things of time. O these clogs, fetters, valleys, and mountains, which obstruct my course, darken my views, slacken my pace, and disable me in service! Well it is for me that I am not under the law—but under grace.

Tomorrow is the Sunday. I am usually glad when it returns, though it seldom finds me in that frame of mine which I would desire. But it is my happiness to live among many who count the hours from one ordinance to another. I know they pray that I may be a messenger of peace, and an instrument of good to their souls; and I have cause to hope their prayers are in a measure answered. For their sakes, as much as my own, I am glad to go up to the house of the Lord. O that in watering *others*—I may be also watered *myself*!

I have been praying that tomorrow may be a day of power with you and with us, and with all who love Jesus in sincerity; that we may see his glory, and taste his love in the sanctuary! When it is thus, the Sunday is a blessed day indeed—a pledge of heaven. There they keep an everlasting Sabbath, and cease not night or day admiring the riches of redeeming love, and adoring Him who washed his people from their sins in his own blood.

To have such imperfect communion with Him as is in this state attainable in this pleasing exercise, is what alone can make life worth the name. For this I sigh and long, and cry to the Lord to rend the *veil of unbelief*, scatter the *clouds of ignorance*, and break down the *walls which sin* is daily building up to hide him from my eyes. I hope I can say, My soul is athirst for God, and nothing less than the light of his countenance can satisfy me! Blessed be his Name for this desire—it is his own gift, and he never gives it in vain. He will afford

us a *taste* of the water of life along the way; and before long we shall drink abundantly at the fountain-head, and be done with illness forever. May we be thankful for what we have received—and still earnestly desirous of more.

Seven letters to a Pastor

LETTER 1

Dear Sir,

The Lord is pleased, in a measure, to show me the suitableness and necessity of a humble, dependent frame of heart. A ceasing from self, and a reliance upon him in the due use of appointed means, I am far from having attained—but I hope I am pressing, at least seeking after it. I wish to speak the word simply and experimentally, and to be so engaged with the importance of the subject, the worth of souls, and the thought that I am speaking in the name and presence of the Most High God, as that I might, if possible, forget everything else. This would be an attainment indeed! More good might be expected from a broken discourse, delivered in such a frame, than from the most advantageous display of knowledge and gifts without it. Not that I would undervalue propriety and pertinence of expression; it is our duty to study to find out acceptable words, and to endeavor to appear as workmen that need not be ashamed; but those who have most ability in this way, have need of a double guard of grace and wisdom, lest they be tempted to trust in it, or to value themselves upon it. Those who trust in the Lord shall never be moved; and those who abase themselves before him, he will exalt. I am well persuaded that your conduct and views have been agreeable to these sentiments; and therefore the Lord has supported, encouraged, and owned you; and I trust he will still bless you, and make you a blessing to many. He who walks humbly—walks surely.

LETTER 2

August 14, 1770.

My Dear Sir,

I know not that I ever had those solemn views of sin which you speak of; and though I believe I should be better for them, I dare not seriously wish for them. There is a petition which I have heard in public prayer—Lord, show us the evil of our hearts. To this petition I cannot venture to set my Amen; at least not without a qualification: Show me enough of *yourself* to balance the view, and then show me what you please. I think I have a very clear and strong conviction in my judgment—that I am vile and worthless; that my heart is full of evil, only evil, and that continually. I know something of it too experimentally; and therefore, judging of the whole by the sample, though I am not suitably affected with what I do see, I tremble at the thought of seeing more.

A man may look with some pleasure upon the sea in a storm, provided he stands safe upon the land himself; but to be upon the sea in a storm, is quite another thing. And yet, surely, the coldness, worldliness, pride, and twenty other evils under which I groan, owe much of their strength to the lack of that *feeling sense of my own abominations*, with which you have been favored. I say favored; for I doubt not but the Lord gave it to you in mercy, and that it has proved, and will prove, a mercy to you, to make you more humble, spiritual, and dependent, as well as to increase your ability for preaching the Gospel of his grace. Upon these accounts, I can assure you, that, upon a first reading, and until I stopped a moment to count the cost, I was ready to envy you all that you had felt. I often seem to know what the Scripture teaches both of *sin* and *grace*—as if I knew them not; so faint and languid are my perceptions, I often seem to think and talk of sin without any sorrow—and of grace without any joy.

Some people say that they are spiritually awakened by dreams. I do not think, that, strictly speaking, that dreams are able to awaken a dead soul. I suppose people may be terrified by them, and made thoughtful—but they awakened only by the Word. The dreams either sent them to hear the Gospel, or roused them to attend to it; but it was the knowledge of the truth brought home to the heart, which did the business of conversion.

Two people here, who lived like heathens, and never came to church, were alarmed by some terrifying dreams, and came out to hearing forthwith. There the Lord was pleased to meet with them. One of them died triumphing; the other, I hope, will do so when her time comes. Whatever means, instruments, or occasions he is pleased to employ, the work is all his own; and I trust you and I are made willing to give him all the glory, and to sink into the dust at the thought that he should ever permit us to take his holy name upon our polluted lips.

LETTER 3

June 13, 1772.

My dear Sir,

You say that your experience agrees with mine. It must be so, because our hearts are alike. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, destitute of good, and prone to evil. This is the character of mankind universally, and those who are made partakers of grace are renewed *but in part*; the evil nature still cleaves to them, and the *root* of sin, though mortified, is far from being dead. While the *cause* remains, it will have *effects*; and while we are burdened with the body of this death, we must groan under it.

But we need not be swallowed up with over-much sorrow, since we have, in Jesus—a Savior, a Righteousness, an Advocate, a Shepherd. "He knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust." If sin abounds in us—grace abounds much more in him. Nor would he allow sin to remain in his people—if he did not know how to over-rule it, and make it an occasion of endearing his love and grace so much the more to their souls.

The Lord forbid, that we should plead his goodness as an encouragement to sloth and indifference! Humiliation, godly sorrow, and self-abasement, befit us; but, at the same time, we may rejoice in the Lord. Though sin remains in us—it shall not have dominion over us; though it wars in us—it shall not prevail against us. We have a Mercy-seat sprinkled with blood; we have an Advocate with the Father; we are called to this warfare, and we fight under the eye of the Captain of our salvation, who is always near to renew our strength, to heal our wounds, and to cover our heads in the heat of battle.

As ministers, we preach to those who have like passions and infirmities with ourselves; and by our own feelings, fears, and changes, we learn to speak a word in season to those who are weary, to warn those who stand, and to stretch out a hand of compassion towards those who are fallen; and to commend it to others, from our own experience, as a faithful saying, "that Jesus came to save the chief of sinners." Besides, if the Lord is pleased to give us some liberty, acceptance, and success in preaching the Gospel, we should be in great danger of running mad with spiritual pride—if the Lord did not permit us to feel the depravity and vileness of our hearts, and thereby keep us from forgetting what we are in ourselves.

With regard to your *young people*, you must expect to meet with some disappointment. Perhaps not every one of whom you have conceived hopes, will stand; and some who do truly belong to the Lord are permitted to make sad mistakes, for their future humiliation. It is our part to watch, warn, and admonish. We ought likewise to be concerned for those *slips* and *miscarriages* in others, which we cannot prevent. A minister, if faithful, and of a right spirit, can have no greater joy than to see his people walking honorably and steadily in the truth; and hardly anything will give him more sensible grief, than to see any of them taken in Satan's wiles!

Yet still the Gospel brings relief here. He is wiser than we are, and knows how to make those things subservient to promote his work, which we ought to guard against as evils and hindrances. We are to use the means—he is to rule the whole. If the *faults* of some are made *warnings* to others, and prove in the end occasions of illustrating the riches of Divine grace—this should reconcile us to what we cannot help, though such considerations should not slacken our diligence in sounding an alarm, and reminding our hearers of their continual danger.

LETTER 4

January 26, 1775.

Dear Sir,

I lately read a sermon of Richard Baxter (in the fifth volume of the Morning Exercises), on Mat. 5:16. My mind is something impressed with the subject, and with his manner of treating it. Some of Mr. Baxter's sentiments in divinity are rather cloudy; and he sometimes, upon that account, met with but poor quarter from the staunch Calvinists of his day. But, by what I have read of him, where he is

quiet, and not ruffled by controversy, he appears to me, notwithstanding some mistakes, to have been one of the greatest men of his age; and perhaps, in fervor, spirituality, and success, more than equal, both as a minister and a Christian, to some twenty, taken together, of those who affect to undervalue him in this present day. There is a spirit in some passages of his *Saint's Rest*, and his *Dying Thoughts*, and other of his practical treatises, compared with which, many modern compositions, though well written and well meant, appear to me to a great disadvantage.

But I was speaking of his sermon. He points out the way at which we should aim to let our light shine in the world, for the glory of God, and the conviction and edification of men. The perusal suggested to me some *instruction*—and much *reproof*. Alas! my friend, are we not too often chargeable with a sad, shameful selfishness and narrowness of spirit—far, very far different from that activity, enlargement, and generosity of soul, which such a Gospel as we have received, might be expected to produce! For myself, I must plead guilty. It seems as if my heart was always awake and keenly sensible to my own concerns, while those of my Lord and Master affect me much less forcibly, at least only by intervals.

Were a stranger to judge of me by what I sometimes say in the pulpit, he might think that, like the angels, I had but two things in view—to do the will of God, and to behold his face. But, alas! would he not be almost as much mistaken, as if, seeing Mr. G. in the character of a tragedy hero, he should suppose him to be the very person whom he only represents! I hope Satan will never be able to persuade me that I am a mere *hypocrite* and *stage-player*; but sure I am, that there is so much *hypocrisy* in me, so many *littlenesses* and *self-seekings* insinuating into my plan of conduct, that I have humbling cause to

account myself unworthy and unprofitable, and to say, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord."

I have some idea of what a Christian *ought* to be; and it is, I hope, what I *desire* to be. A Christian should be conformable to Christ in his spirit and in his practice. That is, he should be spiritually minded, dead to the world, filled with zeal for the glory of God, the spread of the Gospel, and the good of souls. He should be humble, patient, meek, cheerful, and thankful under all events and changes. He should account it the business and honor of his life--to imitate Him who pleased not Himself, who went about doing good. The whole deportment of a Christian should show that the saving knowledge of Jesus, affords him all he could expect from it--a balm for every grief, an amends for every loss, a motive for every duty, a restraint from every evil, a pattern for everything which he is called to do or suffer, and a principle sufficient to constitute the actions of every day, even in common life--as acts of piety. He should make every event through which he passes, subservient and subordinate to his main design--the glory of Christ.

Gold is *the worldly man's god*, and his worship and service are uniform and consistent, not by fits and starts—but from morning to night, from the beginning to the end of the year, he is the same man. He will not slip an opportunity of adding to his pelf today, because he may have another tomorrow—but he heartily and eagerly embraces both; and so far as he carries his point, though his perseverance may expose him to the ridicule or reproach of his neighbors, he thinks himself well paid!

LETTER 5

January, 1776.

Dear Sir,

I may learn (only I am a sad dunce) by small and common incidents—as well as by some more striking and important turns in life, that it is not in man to direct his steps. It is not for me to say, *Today or tomorrow I will do this or that*. I cannot write a letter to a friend without God's permission and help, for neither opportunity nor ability are at my own disposal. It is not needful that the Lord should raise a *mountain* in my way, to stop my purpose; if he only withdraws a certain kind of imperceptible support, which in general I have, and use without duly considering whose it is—then, in a moment, I feel myself unstrung and disabled, like a ship which has lost her masts, and cannot proceed until he is pleased to refit me and renew my strength. My *pride* and propensity to *self-dependence* render frequent changes of this kind necessary to me, or I would soon forget what I am, and take the praise to myself.

Therefore, upon the whole, I am satisfied, and see it best that I should be absolutely poor and pennyless in myself, and forced to depend upon the Lord for the smallest things—as well as the greatest. And if, by his blessing, my *experience* should at length tally with my *judgment* in this point—that without Him I can do nothing; then I know I shall find it easy, through him, to do all things; for the *door of his mercy* is always open, and it is but *ask* and *have*. But, alas! a secret persuasion (though contrary to repeated convictions) that I *have* something in myself, too often prevents me going to him for it; and then no wonder I am disappointed. The *life of faith* seems so simple and easy in theory, that I can point it out to others in few words. But in practice it is very difficult; and my advances are so slow, that I hardly dare say I get forward at all. It is a great thing indeed to have the spirit of a little child, so as to be habitually afraid of taking a single step without God's leading.

I am glad to know the Lord is still with you; I trust he has not withdrawn wholly from us. We have much call for *thankfulness*, and much for *humiliation*. Some here are evidently ripening for glory, and now and then we have a new inquirer. But the progress of wickedness among the unconverted here is dreadful. Convictions repeatedly stifled in many, have issued in a *hardness and boldness in sinning*, which I believe is seldom found but in those places where the light of the Gospel has been long resisted and abused. If my eyes suitably affected my heart, I should weep day and night upon this account; but, alas! I am too indifferent! I feel a woeful defect in my *zeal* for God and compassion for souls; and when Satan and conscience charge me with cowardice, treachery, and stupidity—I know not what to reply! I am generally carried through my public work with some liberty; and because I am not put to shame before the people, I seem content and satisfied. I wish to be more thankful for what the Lord is pleased to do among us—but, at the same time, to be more earnest with him for a farther out-pouring of his Spirit. Assist me herein with your prayers.

As to my own private experience, the enemy is not allowed to touch the foundation of my faith and hope; thus far I have peace. But my conflicts with indwelling sin, are very distressing. I cannot doubt of my state and acceptance with God; and yet it seems no one can have more cause for doubts and fears than myself, if such doubtings were at all encouraged by the Gospel; but I see they are not. I see that what I desire and hope for, the Lord promises to do, for his own Name's sake, and notwithstanding all my vileness and perverseness! I cannot question but he has given me (for how else could I have it?) a thirst for that communion with Him in love, and conformity to his image, of which as yet I have experienced but very faint and imperfect beginnings. But if he has begun, I venture, upon his Word—that he will not forsake the work of his own hands.

On public affairs I say but little. Many are censuring men and measures; but I would lay all the blame upon sin. It appears plain to me—that the Lord has a controversy with us; and therefore I fear what we have yet seen is but the beginning of sorrows. I am ready to dread the event of this summer; but I remember that the Lord reigns. He has his own glory and the good of his church in view, and will not be disappointed. He knows how, likewise, to take care of those who fear him. I wish there was more sighing and mourning among professors, for the sins of the nation and the churches!

LETTER 6

Dear Sir,

No very considerable alteration has taken place since I wrote, except the death of Mrs. L, who was removed to a better world in September. The latter part of her course was very painful; but the Lord made her more than conqueror, and she had good cause to apply the Apostle's words, 2Ti. 4:7-8. She repeated that passage in her last illness, and chose it for her funeral text. She was a Christian indeed—her *faith* was great—and so were her *trials*. Now she is above them all—now she is before the Throne! May the good Lord help us to be followers of those who through faith and patience, have attained to the blessed hope set before them.

The number of professors still increases with us; and a greater number of people affords a greater variety of cases, and gives greater scope to observe the workings of the heart and Satan. For seven years I had to say, that I had not seen a person of whom I had conceived a good hope, to go back into the world. But I have met with a few disappointments since. However, upon the whole, I trust the Lord is still with us. The enemy tries to disturb and defile us; and if the Lord

did not keep the city—the poor watchman would watch in vain. But the Eye that never slumbers nor sleeps has been upon us for good; and though we have cause of humiliation and sorrow—we have likewise much cause of thankfulness.

My health is still preserved; and I hope that the Lord does not allow my desires of personal communion with him, and of usefulness in the ministry, to decline. He supplies me with fresh strength and matter in my public work. I hear now and then of one brought to inquire of the way of salvation. Christ's presence is at times made known to many in the ordinances.

To combine *zeal* with *prudence* is indeed difficult. There is often too much *SELF* in our *zeal*—and too much of the *fear of man* in our *prudence*. However, what we cannot attain by any skill or resolution of our own, we may hope in measure to receive from him who gives liberally to those who seek him, and desire to serve him. *Prudence* is a much abused word; but there is a *heavenly wisdom*, which the Lord has promised to give to those who humbly wait upon him for it. It does not consist in forming a bundle of rules and maxims—but in a *spiritual taste* and *discernment*, derived from an experimental knowledge of the truth, and of the heart of man, as described in the Word of God. Its exercise consists much in a simple dependence upon the Lord, to guide and prompt us in every action. We seldom act wrong, when we truly depend upon him, and can cease from leaning to our own understanding. When the heart is thus in a right tune and frame, and his Word dwells richly in us—there is a kind of immediate perception of what is proper for us to do in present circumstances, without much painful inquiry—a light shines before us upon the path of duty. And if He permits us in such a spirit to make some mistakes, he will likewise teach us to profit by them; and

our reflections upon what was wrong one day, will make us to act more wisely the next.

At best, we must always expect to meet with new proofs of our own weakness and insufficiency; otherwise, how would we be kept humble, or know how to prize the liberty He allows us of coming to the Throne of Grace, for fresh forgiveness and direction every day? But if He enables us to walk before Him with a single eye, He will graciously accept our desire of serving Him better if we could; and his blessing will make our feeble endeavors in some degree successful, at the same time that we see defects and evils attending our best services, are sufficient to make us ashamed of them.

LETTER 7

January 11, 1777.

Dear Sir,

We all need, and at the seasons the Lord sees best—we all receive, *chastisement*. I hope you likewise have reason to praise him, for supporting, sanctifying, and delivering mercy. The coward flesh presently shrinks under the rod, but faith need not fear it; for it is in the hand of one who loves us better than we do ourselves, and who knows our frame that we are but dust, and therefore will not allow us to be overdone and overwhelmed.

I feel as a friend should feel for Mr. B. Were I able, I would soon send him health. If the Lord, who is able to remove his illness in a minute, permits it to continue, we may be sure, upon the whole—that it will be best for him. It is, however, very lawful to pray that his health may be restored, and his usefulness prolonged. I ask you to give my love to him, and tell him that my heart bears him an affectionate

remembrance; and I know the God whom he serves will make every difficult dispensation supportable and profitable to him.

If, as you observe, the *Song of Solomon* describes the experience of his church, it shows the *dark* as well as the *bright* side. No one part of it is the experience of every individual at any particular time. Some are in his banqueting-house, others upon their beds. Some sit under his banner, supported by His arm; while others have a faint perception of him at a distance, with many a *hill* and *mountain* between.

In one thing, however, they all agree—that He is the leading object of their desires, and that they have had such a discovery of his person, work, and love—as makes him precious to their hearts. Their *judgment* of him is always the same—but their *sensibility* varies. The love they bear him, though rooted and grounded in their hearts, is not always equally in exercise; nor can it be so. We are like *trees*, which, though alive, cannot put forth their leaves and fruit without the influence of the sun. They are alive in winter as well as in summer; but how different is their *appearance* in these different seasons! Were we always alike—could we always believe, love, and rejoice—we would think the power inherent, and our own. But it is more for the Lord's glory, and more suited to form us to a temper befitting the Gospel—that we should be made deeply sensible of our own inability and dependence, than that we should be always in a lively frame.

I am persuaded, that a broken and a contrite spirit, a conviction of our vileness and nothingness, connected with a cordial acceptance of Jesus as revealed in the Gospel—is the highest attainment we can reach in this life. Sensible comforts are desirable, and we must be in a spiritual declension when they do not appear so to us; but I believe

there may be a real exercise of faith and growth in grace, when our sensible feelings are faint and low. A soul may be in as thriving a state when thirsting, seeking, and mourning after the Lord—as when actually rejoicing in him; as much in earnest when fighting in the valley—as when singing upon the mount. Nay, *dark seasons* afford the surest and strongest manifestations of the power of faith. To hold fast the Word of promise, to maintain a hatred of sin, to go on steadfastly in the path of duty, in defiance both of the frowns and the smiles of the world, when we have but little comfort—is a more certain evidence of grace—than a thousand things which we may do or forbear when our spirits are warm and lively.

I have seen many who have been, upon the whole—but uneven walkers, though at times they have seemed to enjoy, at least have talked of, great spiritual comforts. I have seen others, for the most part, complain of much spiritual darkness and coldness, who have been remarkably humble, tender, and exemplary in their spirit and conduct. Surely, were I to choose my lot, it would be with the latter.

Five Letters to a Christian friend

Letter 1

January 16, 1775.

Dear friend,

I can sympathize with you in your troubles—yet, knowing the nature of our calling, that, by an unalterable appointment, *the way to the kingdom lies through many tribulations*, I ought to rejoice, rather than otherwise, that to you it is given, not only to *believe*—but also to *suffer*. If you escaped these things, whereof all the Lord's children are partakers, might not you question your adoption into his family?

How could the power of grace be manifest, either *to* you, *in* you, or *by* you, without afflictions? How could the corruptions and devastations of the heart be checked, without a cross? How could you acquire a tenderness and skill in speaking to those who are weary, without a taste of such trials as they also meet with? You would only be a *hearsay witness* to the truth, power, and sweetness of the precious promises, unless you have been in such a situation as to need them, and to find their suitableness and sufficiency.

The Lord has given you a good desire to serve him in the Gospel, and he is now training you for that service. Many things, yes, the most important things, belonging to the Gospel ministry, are not to be learned by books and study—but by *painful experience*. You must expect a variety of difficult trials—but two things he has promised you—that you shall not be tried above what he will enable you to bear, and that all shall work together for your good!

Were we to acquire no other knowledge of the Christian warfare, than what we could derive from cool and undisturbed book study, instead of coming forth as able ministers of the New Testament, and competently acquainted with the with the devices, the deep-laid devices and stratagems of Satan—we would prove to be worthless. But the Lord will take better care of those whom He loves and designs to honor. He will try, and permit them to be tried, in various ways. He will make them feel much affliction in themselves, that they may know how to feel much for others.

This painful discipline is necessary to enable us to take the field in a public capacity with courage, wisdom, and success, that we may lead and animate others in the fight! It is equally necessary for our own sakes, that we may obtain and preserve the grace of humility, which He has taught you to set a high value upon. Indeed, we cannot value

it too highly; for we can be neither comfortable, safe, nor habitually useful, without sincere humility! The root of pride lies deep in our fallen nature, and, where the Lord has given great abilities—pride would grow apace, if He did not mercifully watch over us, and suit His dealings with us, to keep it down.

Therefore I trust He will make you willing to endure hardships, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. May He enable you to behold Him with faith holding out the prize, and saying to you, "Fear none of those things that you shall suffer! Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life!"

We sail upon a turbulent and tumultuous sea—but we are embarked on a good vessel, and in a good cause. We have an infallible and almighty Pilot, who has the winds and weather at his command, and can silence the storm into a calm with a word, whenever he pleases. We may be persecuted—but we shall not be forsaken; we may be cast down—but we cannot be destroyed. Many will molest us that we may fall—but the Lord will uphold us!

I am sorry to find you are quite alone at Cambridge; for I hoped there would be a succession of serious students to supply the place of those who are transplanted to shine as lights in the world. Yet you are not alone; for the Lord is with you, the best counselor and the best friend! There is a strange backwardness in us (at least in me) fully to improve that gracious intimacy to which he invites us. Alas! that we so easily wander from the fountain of life—to hew out broken cisterns for ourselves; and that we seem more attached to a few drops of his grace in our fellow-creatures, than to the fullness of grace that is in himself! I think nothing gives me a more striking sense of my depravity, than my perverseness and folly in this respect. Yet he bears with me, and does me good continually.

Letter 2

March, 1776

Dear friend,

It gave me particular pleasure to hear that the Lord helped you through your difficulties, and succeeded your desires. And I have sympathized with you in the complaints you make of a dark and mournful frame of spirit afterwards. But is not this, upon the whole, right and beneficial, that, if the Lord is pleased at one time to strengthen us remarkably in answer to prayer—that he should leave us at another time, so far as to give us a real sensibility that we were supported by his power, and not our own?

Besides, as you feel a danger of being elated by the respect paid to you, was it not a merciful and seasonable dispensation which made you feel your own weakness, to prevent your being exalted above measure? The Lord, by withdrawing *his smiles* from you, reminded you that the *smiles of men* are of little value, otherwise perhaps you might have esteemed them too highly. Indeed, you pastors that know the Lord, are singular instances of the power of his grace; for (like the young men in Daniel 3.) *you live in the very midst of the fire!*

Your *mathematical studies* in particular have such a tendency to engross and fix the mind to the contemplation of cold and uninteresting truth, and you are surrounded with so much intoxicating applause if you succeed in your researches, that for a soul to be kept humble and alive in such a situation, is such a proof of the Lord's presence and power—as Moses had when he saw the bush unconsummated in the midst of the flames! I believe I had naturally a turn for the mathematics myself, and dabbled in them a little way; and though I did not go far, my *head*, sleeping and waking,

was stuffed with diagrams and calculations. Everything I looked at that exhibited either a right line or a curve, set my wits a wool-gathering. What then must have been the case—had I proceeded to the study of speculative geometry? I bought my namesake's geometry book—but I have reason to be thankful that I left it as I found it, a sealed book, and that the bent of my mind was drawn to something of more real importance before I understood it. I say not this to discourage you in your pursuits. they lie in your line and path of duty; in mine they did not.

As to your *academics*, I am glad that the Lord enables you to show those among whom you live, that the knowledge of his Gospel does not despoil you either of diligence or acumen. However, as I said, you need a *double guard of grace*, to preserve you from being either *puffed up* or *deadened* by those things, which, to preserve your rank and character in the University while you remain there, are, if taken in the aggregate, little better than *splendid trifles!*

If my poor people could form the least conception of what *the learned* at Cambridge chiefly admire in each other, and what is the intrinsic reward of all their toil, they would say, "What a foolish waste of time!" How gladly would some of them, if such mathematical and metaphysical lumber could by any means get into their heads, how gladly would they desire to get it out again! How many perplexities are they freed from, by their *happy ignorance*, which often pester those to their lives' end—who have had their *natural proneness to vain reasoning* sharpened by academic studies!

Letter 3

May 18, 1776.

Dear friend,

Though I wished to hear from you sooner, I put a candid interpretation upon *your silence*—but felt no disposition to anger. Let our correspondence be free from fetters. Write when you *please*, and when you *can*. I will do the like. Apologies may be spared on both sides. I am not a very punctual correspondent myself, having so many letters to write, and therefore have no right to stand upon punctilios with you.

I sympathize with you in your sorrow for your friend's death. Such things are very distressing! But such a case might have been our own. Let us pray for grace to be thankful for ourselves, and submit everything in humble silence to the sovereign Lord—who has a right to do as He pleases with His own.

We feel and grieve for any deaths in our own little circles; but O, the dreadful mischief of sin! Human death is as frequent as the hours, the minutes, perhaps the moments of every day. And though we may be impacted by but one death in a million—the souls of all others have an equal capacity for endless happiness or misery!

I congratulate you upon your admission into the ministry, and pray God to favor you with a single eye to his glory, and a fresh anointing of his Holy Spirit, that you may come forth as a scribe well instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, and that his Word in your mouth may abundantly prosper.

I truly pity those who rise early and study late, and eat the *bread of worry*, with no higher prize and prospect in view—than the obtaining of academic honors! Such pursuits will before long appear (as they really are) as vain as the foolish games of children! May the Lord impress them with a noble ambition of living to and for him. If these scholars, who are *laboring for pebbles* under the semblance of

goodly pearls, had a discovery of the *Pearl of great price*, how quickly and gladly would they lay down their admired attainments, and become fools—that they might be truly wise!

Friend, what a snare have you escaped! You would have been nothing but a scholar—had not God visited your heart and enlightened you by His grace! Now I trust you account your former academic gains, but loss—compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus. What you have attained in the way of learning, will be useful to you—if sanctified, and chiefly so by the knowledge which you have of its insufficiency to any valuable purpose in the great concerns of life—knowing God and walking with Him!

I am pleased with your fears lest you should not be understood in your preaching. Indeed, there is a danger of it. It is not easy for people of quick minds—duly to conceive how amazingly ignorant and slow of apprehension, the bulk of our congregations generally are. When our own ideas are clear, and our expressions proper—we are ready to think we have sufficiently explained ourselves; and yet, perhaps, nine out of ten (especially of those who are destitute of spiritual light) know little more of what we say—than if we were speaking Greek!

A degree of this inconvenience is always inseparable from *written sermons*. They cast our thoughts into a style, which, though familiar to ourselves, is too remote from common conversation to be comprehended by narrow capacities of our hearers; which is one chief reason of the preference I give to *extemporary preaching*. When we *read* to the people, they think themselves less concerned in what is offered—than when we *speak* to them point-blank.

It seems a good rule, which I have met with somewhere, and which perhaps I have mentioned to you—to fix our eyes upon some one of

the congregation whom we judge of the least mental capacity. If we can make him understand, we may hope to be understood by the rest of our hearers.

Let those who seek to be *admired* for the exactness of their compositions, enjoy the poor reward they aim at. it is best for Gospel preachers to speak *plain language*. If we thus *singly aim at the glory of our Master and the good of souls*—we may hope for the accompanying power of his Spirit, which will give our discourses a weight and energy, that the *golden-mouthed Demosthenes* had no conception of!

I can give you no information of a pastorate in a better situation. But either the Lord will provide you one, or I trust he will give you usefulness, and fullness and a competency of health and spirits where you are. He who caused Daniel to thrive upon vegetables and water, can make you strong and cheerful even in your bad situation—if he sees that best for you. All things obey him, and you need not fear but he will *enable* you for whatever service he has *appointed* you to perform!

This letter has been a week in hand—many interruptions from without, and indispositions within. I seem to while away my life, and shall be glad to be saved upon the footing of the thief upon the cross, without any hope or plea—but the power and grace of Jesus, who has said, I will in nowise cast out! Adieu.

Letter 4

Sept. 10, 1777.

Dear friend,

I was glad to hear from you at last, not being willing to think myself forgotten. It seems, by your account, that you are far from well—but I hope you are as well as you ought to be—that is, as well as the *Lord*

sees it good for you to be. I say, I hope so—for I am not sure that the *length* and *vehemence* of your sermons, which you tell me astonish many people, may not be rather improper and imprudent, considering the *weakness of your constitution*; at least, if this expression of yours is justly expounded by a report which has reached me, that the length of your sermons is frequently *two hours*, and the vehemence of your voice so great that you may be heard far beyond the church-walls.

I would be unwilling to dampen your zeal—but I feel unwilling likewise, that by excessive, unnecessary exertions, that you should wear away very soon, and preclude your own usefulness! This concern is so much upon my mind, that I begin with it, though it makes me skip over the former part of your letter—but when I have relieved myself upon this point, I can easily skip back again.

I am perhaps the more ready to credit the report, because I know that the spirits of some high-strung people are highly volatile. I consider you as mounted upon a fiery steed, and provided you use due management and circumspection, you travel more pleasantly than *we plodding folks* upon our sober, stolid horses—but then, if instead of pulling the rein you plunge in the spurs, and add wings to the wind—I cannot but be in pain for the *consequences*. Permit me to remind you of an old adage—*the end of speaking is to be heard*; and if the person farthest from the preacher can hear, he speaks loud enough.

Upon some occasions, a few sentences of a discourse may be enforced with a voice still more elevated—but to be uncommonly **loud** from beginning to end—is hurtful to the *speaker*, and in no way useful to the *hearer*. It is a fault which many inadvertently give into at first, and which many have repented of too late—when the harmful

practice has rendered it habitual, it is not easily corrected. I know some think that preaching very *loudly*—and preaching with *power*—are synonymous expressions. But your judgment is too good to fall in with that false sentiment.

There is a quotation from *Homer*, where he describes the *eloquence of Nestor*, and compares it, not to a thunderstorm or hurricane—but to a *fall of snow*, which, though pressing, insinuating, and penetrating, is soft and gentle. I think the simile is beautiful and expressive.

Secondly (as we say), as to **long** preaching. There is an old-fashioned instrument called an *hour-glass*, which in days of yore, before *clocks* and *watches* abounded, used to be the measure of many a good sermon, and I think it a tolerable stint. I cannot wind up my ends to my own satisfaction in a much shorter time, nor am I pleased with myself if I greatly exceed it.

If an *angel* was to preach for two hours—unless his hearers were angels likewise—the greater part of them wish that he had preached for a much shorter time! It is a shame it should be so—but so it is! Partly through the *weakness* and partly through the *wickedness* of the flesh—we can seldom stretch our attention to spiritual things for two hours together without cracking it, and hurting its spring! When weariness begins—edification ends! It is better to feed our people like chickens—a little and often—than to cram them like turkeys, until they cannot hold one more mouthful!

Besides, overlong sermons break in upon family concerns, and often call off the thoughts from the sermon—to the pudding at home, which is in danger of being over-boiled! *Long sermons* leave likewise but little time for secret or family religion, which are both very good in their place, and are entitled to a share of each Sunday.

Upon the *preacher* they must have a bad effect, and tend to wear him down before his time. I have known some, by over preaching at first, have been constrained to sit still and do little or nothing for months or years afterwards. I recommend you to this wise advice: *Set* out at such a pace—that you may *hold* out to your journey's end.

Now, if Fame with her hundred mouths has brought me a false report of you, and you are not guilty of preaching either too *long* or too *loud*, still I am not willing my remonstrance may go for nothing. I desire you to accept it, and thank me for it as a proof of my love to you, and likewise of the sincerity of my friendship; for if I had wished to flatter you—I could easily have written on another subject.

I have one more report to trouble you with, because it troubles me; and therefore you must bear a part of my burden. Assure me it is false, and I will send you one of the handsomest letters I can devise by way of thanks. It is reported, (but I will not believe it until you say I must), that you stand upon your tiptoes, upon the point of being whirled out of our vortex, and hurried away, comet-like, into the regions of eccentricity! In plain English—that you have a hankering to be an *itinerant*. But to be serious—for it is a serious subject; let me beg you to deliberate well, and to pray earnestly before you take this step. Be afraid of acting in your own spirit, or under a wrong impression, however honestly you intend—you may be mistaken. The Lord has given you a little charge; be faithful in it, and in his good time he will advance you to a greater—but let his providence evidently open the door to you, and be afraid of moving one step before the cloud and pillar.

I have had my warm fits and desires of this sort in my time—but I have reason to be thankful that I was held in with a strong hand. I wish there were more itinerant preachers. If a man has grace and

zeal, and but limited abilities, let him go and diffuse the substance of a dozen sermons over as many counties. But you have natural and acquired abilities, which qualify you for the more difficult, and, in my judgment, not less important, station of a church minister. I wish you to be a burning, shining, steady light. You may perhaps have less popularity; that is, you will be less exposed to the workings of self and the snares of Satan, if you stay with us—but I think you may live in the full exercise of your gifts and graces, be more consistent with your voluntary engagements, and have more peace of mind, and humble fellowship with God—in watching over a flock which he has committed to you, than, by forsaking them, to wander up and down the earth without a determined scope.

Letter 5

Dear friend,

If you have not actually passed the point of no return concerning going into an *itinerant ministry*—if there is yet room for deliberation, I once more entreat you to pause and consider. In many respects I ought to be willing to learn from you—but in one point I have a little advantage of you. I am some years older, both in life and in experience; and in this difference of time perhaps I have learned something more of the heart, the world, and the devices of Satan, than you have had opportunity for. I hope I would not dampen your zeal—but I will pray the Lord to direct it into the best channel for *permanent usefulness*. I say permanent. I doubt not that you would be useful in the *itinerant ministry*—but I more and more observe great inconveniences follow in that way. Where you make a gathering of people, others will follow you; and if they all possessed your spirit, and had your unselfish views, it might be well. But, generally, an able preacher only so far awakens people to a desire to hear, as exposes

them to the incursions of various winds of doctrine, and the attempts of injudicious pretenders, who will resemble you in nothing but your eagerness to post from place to place. From such measures, in time, proceed errors, parties, contentions, offenses, enthusiasms, spiritual pride, and a noisy ostentatious form of godliness—but little of that power and life of faith which shows itself by humility, meekness, and love.

A parochial minister, who lives among his people, who sees and converses with them frequently, and exemplifies his doctrine in their view by his practice, having knowledge of their spiritual states, trials, growth, and dangers—suits himself to their various states, and, by the blessing of God, builds them up, and brings them forward in faith and holiness. He is instrumental in forming their experience; he leads them to a solid, orderly, Scriptural knowledge of Divine things. If his name is not in so many *mouths* as that of the itinerant—it is upon the *hearts* of the people of his charge. He lives with them as a father with his children. His steady consistent behavior silences in some measure the clamors of his enemies; and the Lord opens him doors of occasional usefulness in many places.

I now wish I had taken larger paper, for I have not room for all I would say. I have no end to serve. I am of no party. I wish well to itinerants who love and preach the Gospel. I am content that they should labor that way, who have not talents nor gifts to support the character, and fill up the office of a parochial minister. But I think you are qualified for more important service. We are *hasty*, like children—but God often appoints us a *waiting* time. Perhaps it requires as much or more grace to *wait*—than to be *active*; for it is more trying to *SELF*. After all, whatever course you take, I shall love you, pray for you, and be glad to see you.

Three Letters to a Tempted Believer

LETTER 1

June 20, 1776.

Madam,

It would be both unkind and ungrateful in me, to avail myself of any *plea of business* for delaying the acknowledgment I owe you for your favor. Could I have known in time that you were in town, I would have endeavored to have called upon you while here; and very glad would I have been to have seen you. But those who fear the Lord may be sure, that whatever is not achievable is not necessary. God could have over-ruled every difficulty in your way, had he seen it expedient. But he is pleased to show you, that you depend not upon men—but upon himself; and that, notwithstanding your situation, may exclude you from some advantages in point of outward means. He who has begun a good work in you, is able to carry it on, in defiance of all *seeming hindrances*, and make all things (even those which have the most unfavorable appearances) work together for your good.

A sure effect of his grace, is a desire and longing for Gospel ordinances; and when they are afforded, they cannot be neglected without loss. But the Lord sees many souls who are dear to him, and whom he is training up in a growing fitness for his kingdom, who are by his providence so situated, that it is not in their power to attend upon Gospel preaching; and perhaps they have seldom either Christian minister or Christian friend to assist or comfort them. Such a situation is a state of trial; but Jesus is all-sufficient, and he is always near. They cannot be debarred from his Word of grace, nor from his throne of grace, for those who feel their need of him, and whose hearts are drawn towards him, are always at the foot of it.

Every room in the house, yes, every spot they stand on—fields, lanes, and hedge-rows, all is holy ground to them; for the Lord is there.

The chief difference between us and the disciples, when our Savior was upon earth, is in this: they then walked by *sight*, and we are called to walk by *faith*. They could see him with their bodily eyes; we cannot; but he said before he left them, "It is expedient for you that I go away." How could this be, unless that spiritual communion which he promised to maintain with his people after his ascension, were preferable to that fellowship he allowed them while he was visibly with them? But we are sure it is preferable, and those who had tried both—were well satisfied that he had made good his promise; so that, though they had known him after the flesh, they were content not to know him so any more.

Yes, madam, though we cannot see him—he sees us; he is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. In a natural state, we have very dark, and indeed dishonorable, thoughts of God—we conceive of him as at a distance. But when the heart is awakened, we begin to make Jacob's reflection, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I knew it not!" And when we receive saving faith, we begin to know that this ever-present God is in Christ; that the government of heaven and earth, the dispensations of the kingdom of nature, providence, and grace—are in the hands of Jesus; that it is He with whom we have to do, who once suffered agony and death for our redemption, and whose compassion and tenderness are the same, now that he reigns over all blessed forever, as when he conversed among men in the days of his humiliation.

Thus God is made known to us by the Gospel, in the endearing views of a Savior, a Shepherd, a Husband, a Friend; and a way of access is opened for us through the veil, that is, the human nature of our

Redeemer, to enter, with humble confidence, into the holiest of all, and to repose all our cares and concerns upon the strength of that everlasting arm which upholds heaven and earth, and upon that infinite love which submitted to the shame, pain, and death of the cross—to redeem sinners from wrath and misery!

Though there is a height, a breadth, a length, and a depth, in this mystery of redeeming love, exceeding the comprehension of all finite minds; yet the great and leading principles which are necessary for the support and comfort of our souls, may be summed up in a very few words. Such a summary we are favored with in Titus 2:11-14, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." Here the whole of salvation, all that is needful to be known, experienced, practiced, and hoped for, is comprised within the compass of four verses.

If many books, much study, and great discernment, were necessary in order to be saved, what must the poor and simple do? Yet for them especially, is the Gospel designed; and few but such as these, attain the knowledge and comfort of it.

The Bible is a sealed book—until the heart be awakened by the Holy Spirit; and, then, he who runs may read. The propositions of the Gospel are few:

I am a sinner, therefore I need a Savior, one who is both *able* and *willing* to save to the uttermost. Such a one is Jesus: he is all that I need—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But

will he receive me? Can I answer a previous question? Am I willing to receive him? If so, and if his word may be taken, if he meant what he said, and promised no more than he can perform—I may be sure of a welcome! He knew, long before, the doubts, fears, and suspicions which would arise in my mind when I would come to know what I *am*, what I have *done*, and what I have *deserved*; and therefore he declared, before he left the earth, "Him who comes to me—I will never cast out." I have no money or price in my hand, no worthiness to recommend me. And I need none, for he saves freely—for his own name's sake. I have only to be thankful for what he has already shown me, and to wait upon him for more. It is my part to *commit* myself to him—as the Physician of sin-sick souls, not to *prescribe* to him how he shall treat me. To begin, carry on, and perfect the cure—is his part.

The *doubts* and *fears* you speak of are, in a greater or less degree, the common experience of all the Lord's people, at least for a time. While any unbelief remains in the heart, and Satan is permitted to tempt—we shall feel these things. In themselves they are groundless and evil; yet the Lord permits and over-rules them for good. They tend to make us know more of the plague of our own hearts, and feel more sensibly the need of a Savior, and make his rest (when we attain it) doubly sweet and sure—and they likewise qualify us for pitying and comforting others.

Fear not—only believe, wait, and pray. Expect not all at once. A Christian is not of hasty growth, like a mushroom—but rather like the oak, the progress of which is hardly perceptible—but in time becomes a great deep-rooted tree. If my writings have been useful to you, may the Lord have the praise. To administer any comfort to his children is the greatest honor and pleasure I can receive in this life. I cannot promise to be a very punctual correspondent, having many

engagements; but I hope to do all in my power to reply to your correspondence.

LETTER 2

August 20, 1776.

Madam,

Though in general I think myself tolerably punctual when I can answer a letter in six or seven weeks after the receipt—yet I feel some pain for not having acknowledged yours sooner. A case like that which you have favored me with an account of, deserved an immediate attention; and when I read it, I proposed writing within a day or two, and I can hardly allow any *plea of business* to be sufficient excuse for delaying it so long; but our times are in the Lord's hands—may he now enable me to send you what may prove a word in season.

Your exercises have been by no means singular, though they may appear so to yourself; because, in your retired situation, you have not (as you observe) had much opportunity of knowing the experience of other Christians; nor has the *guilt* with which your mind has been so greatly burdened, been properly your own. It was a *temptation* forced upon you by the enemy—and he shall answer for it.

Undoubtedly it is a mournful proof of the depravity of our nature, that there is that within us, which renders us so easily susceptible of Satan's suggestions; a proof of our extreme weakness, that, after the clearest and most satisfying evidences of the truth, we are not able to hold fast our confidence, if the Lord permits Satan to *sift* and *shake* us. But I can assure you, that these changes are not uncommon. I have known people, who, after walking with God comfortably for forty years, have been at their wit's end from such assaults as you

mention, and been brought to doubt, not only of the reality of their own hopes—but of the very ground and foundation upon which their hopes were built!

Had you remained, as it seems you once were, attached to the vanities of a mirthful and debauched life, or could you have been content with a *form of godliness*, destitute of the power—it is probable you would have remained a stranger to these troubles. Satan would have employed his arts in a different and less perceptible way, to have soothed you into a *false peace*, and prevented any thought or suspicion of danger from arising in your mind. But when he could no longer detain you in his bondage, or seduce you back again into the world—then of course he would change his method, and declare open war against you.

You have experienced a specimen of his *power* and *malice*; and the Lord, whom you loved, because he first loved you, permitted it, not to gratify Satan—but for your benefit to humble and prove you, to show you what is in your heart, and to do you good in the outcome. These things, for the present, are not joyous but grievous; yet in the end they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. In the mean time, his eye is upon you; he has appointed bounds both to the *degree* and the *duration* of the trial. And he does and will afford you such supports, that you shall not be tried beyond what you are enabled to bear. I doubt not, but your conflicts and sorrows will in due time terminate in praise and victory, and be sanctified to your fuller establishment in the truth.

I greatly rejoice in the Lord's goodness to your dying parent. How wisely timed, and how exactly suited, was that affecting dispensation, to break the force of those suggestions with which the enemy was aiming to overwhelm your spirit. He could not stand against such an

illustrious demonstrative attestation, that the doctrines you had embraced were not cunningly devised fables. He could proceed no farther in that way; but he is prolific in resources. His next attempt, of course, was to fix guilt upon your conscience, as if you had yourself formed and willingly entertained those thoughts, which, indeed, you suffered with extreme reluctance and pain. Here likewise I find he succeeded for a time; but he who broke the former snare, will deliver you from this likewise!

The dark and dishonorable thoughts of God, which I hinted at as belonging to a natural state, are very different from the thoughts of your heart concerning him. You do not conceive of him as a hard master, or think you could be more happy in the breach—than in the observance of his precepts. You do not prefer the world to his favor, or think you can please him, and make amends for your sins by an obedience of your own. These, and such as these, are the thoughts of the natural heart—the very reverse of yours.

One thought, however, I confess you have indulged, which is no less dishonorable to the Lord than uncomfortable to yourself. You say, "I dare not believe that God will not impute to me as sin, the admission of thoughts which my soul ever abhorred, and to which my will never consented." Nay, you fear lest they should not only be imputed—but unpardonable. But how can this be possible? Indeed I will not call it *your* thought; it is your *temptation*. You tell me you have children. Then you will easily understand a plain illustration, which just now occurs to me.

Let me suppose a case which has sometimes happened: a child, three or four years of age we will say, while playing incautiously at a little distance from home, should be suddenly seized and carried away by a gypsy. Poor thing! how terrified, how distressed must it be!

Methinks I hear its cries. The sight and violence of the stranger, the recollection of its dear parents, the loss of its pleasing home, the dread and uncertainty of what is yet to befall it—is it not a wonder that it does not die in agony? But see, help is at hand—the gypsy is pursued, and the child recovered. Now, my dear madam, permit me to ask you, if this were your child, how would you receive it? Perhaps, when the first transports of your joy for its safety would permit you, you might gently chide it for leaving your door; but would you disinherit it? Would you disown it? Would you deliver it up again to the gypsy with your own hands, because it had suffered a violence which it could not withstand, which it abhorred, and to which its will never consented? And yet what is the tenderness of a mother, of ten thousand mothers, compared to that which our compassionate Savior bears to every poor soul that has been enabled to flee to him for salvation! Let us be far from charging that to him, of which we think we are utterly incapable ourselves!

Take courage, madam! Resist the devil—and he will flee from you. If he were to tempt you to anything criminal, you would start at the thought, and renounce it with abhorrence. Do the same when he tempts you to question the Lord's compassion and goodness. But there he imposes upon us with a *show of humility*, and persuades us that we do well to oppose *our unworthiness* as a sufficient exception to the many express promises of the Word. It is said, the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin; that all manner of sin shall be forgiven for his sake; that whoever comes he will in no wise cast out; and that he is able to save to the uttermost. Believe his Word—and Satan shall be found a liar!

If the child had deliberately gone away with the gypsy, had preferred that wretched way of life, had refused to return, though frequently and tenderly invited home; perhaps a parent's love might, in time, be

too weak to plead for the pardon of such continued obstinacy. But, indeed, in this manner we *have* all dealt with the Lord—and yet, whenever we are willing to return—he is willing to receive us with open arms, and without an upbraiding word! Luke 15:20-22. Though our sins have been deep-dyed, like scarlet and crimson, enormous as mountains, and countless as the sands, the sum total is, *Sin has abounded; but where sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded!*

After all, I know the Lord keeps the *key of comfort* in his own hands—yet he has commanded us to attempt comforting one another. I should rejoice to be his instrument of administering comfort to you. I shall hope to hear from you soon; and that you will then be able to inform me he has restored to you the joys of his salvation. But if not yet, wait for him, and you shall not wait in vain.

LETTER 3

June, 1777.

My dear Madam,

Temptations may be compared to the wind, which when it has ceased raging from one point, after a short calm, it frequently renews its violence from another quarter. The Lord silenced Satan's former assaults against you—but he is permitted to try you again in another way. Be of good courage, madam, wait upon the Lord, and the present *storm* shall likewise subside in good time. You have an infallible Pilot, and are embarked in a voyage against which the winds and waves cannot prevail. You may be *tossed* about, and think yourself in apparent jeopardy—but *sink* you shall not, except the promises and faithfulness of God can fail.

Upon an attentive consideration of your trouble, it seems to me to amount only to this, that though the Lord has done great things for you, he has not yet brought you to a state of dependence on himself, nor released you from that impossibility which all his people feel, of doing anything without him. And is this, indeed, a matter of complaint? Is it not every way better—more for his glory, and more suited to keep us mindful of our obligations to him, and, in the outcome, more for our safety, that we should be reduced to a happy necessity of receiving daily out of his fullness (as the Israelites received the manna), than to be set up with something of a stock of wisdom, power, and goodness of our own?

Adam was thus furnished at the beginning with strength to stand; yet, *mutability* being essential to a *creature*—he quickly fell and lost all. We who are by nature sinners, are not left to so hazardous an experiment. God has himself engaged to keep us, and treasured up all fullness of grace for our support, in a head who cannot fail. Our gracious Savior will communicate all needful supplies to his members—yet in such a manner that they shall feel their need and weakness, and have nothing to boast of from first to last—but his wisdom, compassion, and care. We are in no worse circumstances than the Apostle Paul, who, though eminent and exemplary in the Christian life, found and freely confessed that he had no sufficiency in himself to think a good thought! Nor did he wish it otherwise; he even gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him.

Unbelief, and a thousand other evils, are still in our hearts! Though their *reign* and *dominion* is at an end—they are not slain nor eradicated; their effects will be felt more or less sensibly, as the Lord is pleased more or less to afford or abate his gracious influence. When they are kept under control—we are no better in ourselves, for

they are not kept down by us. But we are very prone to think better of ourselves at such a time; and therefore God is pleased to permit us at seasons—to feel a difference, that we may never forget how *weak* and how *vile* we are. We cannot absolutely *conquer* these evils—but it befits us to be *humbled* for them; and we are to fight, and strive, and pray against them. Our great duty is to be at his footstool, and to cry to him who has promised to perform all things for us.

Why are we called *soldiers*—but because we are called to a *warfare*! And how could we *fight*, if there were no *enemies* to resist? The Lord's soldiers are not merely for show, to make an empty parade in a uniform, and to brandish their arms when none but friends and spectators are around them. No, we must stand upon the field of battle—we must face the fiery darts—we must *wrestle* (which is the closest and most arduous kind of fighting) with our foes! Nor can we well expect wholly to escape wounds; but the leaves of the tree of life are provided for their healing. The Captain of our salvation is at hand, and leads us on with an assurance which might make even a coward bold—that, in the end, we shall be more than conquerors through him who has loved us!

I am ready to think that some of the sentiments in your letters are not properly *yours*, such as you yourself have derived from the Scriptures—but rather borrowed from authors or preachers, whose judgment your humility has led you to prefer to your own. At least, I am sure the Scripture does not authorize the conclusion which distresses you—that if you were a child of God—you would not feel such changes and oppositions. Were I to define a Christian, or rather to describe him at large, I know no text I would choose sooner, as a ground for the subject, than Gal. 5:17, "The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not

do what you want." A Christian has *noble aims*—which distinguish him from the bulk of mankind. His leading principles, motives, and desires—are all supernatural and divine. Could he do as he desires—there is not an angel before the Eternal Throne, that would excel him in holiness, love, and obedience! He would tread in the very footsteps of his Savior, fill up every moment in his service, and employ every breath in his praise.

This he would do—but, alas! he cannot! Against these spiritual desires, there is a contrary desire and working of a corrupt nature, which meets him at every turn! He has a beautiful copy set before him in the Scriptures—he is enamored with it, and though he does not expect to equal it, he writes carefully after it, and longs to attain to the nearest possible imitation. But indwelling sin and Satan continually jog his hand, and spoil his strokes!

You cannot, madam, form a right judgment of yourself, except you make due allowance for those things which are not special to yourself—but common to all who have spiritual perception, and are indeed the inseparable appendages of this mortal state. If it were not so, why should the most spiritual and gracious people be so ready to confess themselves vile and worthless? One eminent branch of our holiness, is a sense of shame and humiliation for those evils which are only known to ourselves, and to him who searches our hearts, joined with an acquiescence in Jesus, who is appointed of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

I will venture to assure you, that though you will possess a more stable peace, in proportion as the Lord enables you to live more simply upon the blood, righteousness, and grace of the Mediator, you will never grow into a better opinion of yourself than you have at present. The nearer you are brought to him, the more lively sense

you will have of your continual need of him, and thereby your admiration of his power, love, and compassion, will increase likewise from year to year.

I would observe farther, that our *spiritual exercises* are not a little influenced by our *constitutional temperament*. As you are only a correspondent, I can but conjecture about you upon this head. If your frame is delicate, and your nervous system very sensible and tender, I should probably ascribe some of your apprehensions to this cause. It is an abstruse subject, and I will not enter into it; but according to the observations I have made—people of this habit seem to live more upon the confines of the invisible world, if I may so speak, and to be more susceptible of impressions from it, than others. That complaint which, for want of a better name, we call *depression of heart*, may probably afford the enemy some special advantages and occasions of distressing you. The mind then perceives objects as through a *tinctured medium*, which gives them a dark and discouraging appearance! And I believe Satan has more influence and address than we are aware of—in managing the glass. And when this is not the case at all times, it may be so occasionally, from sickness or other circumstances.

You tell me that you have lately been in circumstances, which may probably have such an effect as I have hinted. You may be charging yourself with *guilt* for what springs from *physical indisposition*, in which you are merely passive, and which may be no more properly sinful, than the headache, or any of the thousand natural shocks the flesh is heir to!

The enemy can take no advantage but what the Lord permits him; and he will permit him none but what he designs to over-rule for your greater advantage in the end. He delights in your prosperity;

and you should not be in heaviness for an hour, were there not a need be for it. Notwithstanding your fears, I have a good hope, that he who you say has helped you in six troubles—will appear for you in the seventh; that you will not die—but live, and declare the works of the Lord, and come forth to testify to his praise—that he has turned your mourning into joy!

Three Letters to a Christian Friend

Letter 1

My dear Madam,

My reproof was well meant on my side, and well taken on yours. You may perhaps see that my hints were not wholly unnecessary, and I ought to be satisfied with your apology, and am so. The circumstance of your being seen at the *playhouse* has nothing at all mysterious in it, as you say you have not been there for six or seven years—it was neither more nor less than a mistake. I had heard that you had been there within these two years. I am glad to find I was misinformed. I think there is no harm in your supposing, that of the many thousands who frequent *public amusements*, some may, in other respects, be better than yourself—but I hope your humble and charitable construction of their *mistake* will not lead you to extenuate the evil of those diversions in themselves. For though I am persuaded that a few Christians are, for lack of consideration, drawn in to expose themselves in such places—yet I am thoroughly convinced, that if there is any practice in this land which is sinful, attendance on the playhouse is properly and eminently so. The theaters are fountains and paths of vice! I can hardly think there is a

Christian upon earth who would dare to be seen there—if the nature and effects of the theater were properly set before them.

Dr. Witherspoon of Scotland has written an excellent piece upon the stage, or rather against it, which I wish every person who makes the least pretense to fear God had an opportunity of perusing. I cannot judge much more favorably of all the innumerable train of profligacies, by which the god of this world blinds the eyes of multitudes, lest the light of the glorious Gospel should shine in upon them. What an awful aspect upon the present times have such texts as Isaiah 22:12-14. Isaiah 3:12, Amo. 6:3-6, Jam. 4:4. I wish you, therefore, not to plead for any of them—but use all your influence to make them shunned as pest-houses, and dangerous nuisances to precious souls; especially if you know any who you hope in the main are seriously disposed, who yet venture themselves in those haunts of Satan, endeavor earnestly and faithfully to undeceive them.

The time is short; eternity at the door; was there no other evil in these vain amusements than the loss of precious time (but, alas! their name is legion), we have not leisure in our circumstances to regard them. And, blessed be God! we need them not. The Gospel opens a source of purer, sweeter, and more substantial pleasures! We may well bid adieu to these perishing pleasures of sin! We may well pity those who can find pleasure in those amusements where God is shut out; where His name is only mentioned to be profaned; where His commandments are not only broken—but insulted; where sinners proclaim their shame as in Sodom, and attempt not to hide it; where, at best, wickedness is wrapped up in a disguise of entertainment, to make it more insinuating!

I sympathize with all your ailments—but if the Lord is pleased to make them subservient to the increase of your sanctification, to wean

you more and more from this world, and to draw you nearer to himself, you will one day see cause to be thankful for them, and to number them among your choicest mercies. A hundred years hence—it will signify little to you whether you were sick or well the day I wrote this letter.

We thank you for your kind condolence. There is a pleasure in the pity of a friend—but the Lord alone can give true comfort. I hope he will sanctify the breach, and do us good. Mrs. **** exchanges forgiveness with you about your not meeting in London; that is, you forgive her not coming to you, and she forgives you entertaining a suspicious thought of her friendship (though but for a minute) on account of what she was really unable to do.

Letter 2

September 1, 1767.

My dear Madam,

I shall not study for expressions to tell my dear friend how much we were affected by the news that came last post. We had, however, the pleasure to hear that your family was safe. I hope this will find you recovered from the hurry of spirits you must have been thrown into, and that both you and your papa are composed under the appointment of Him who has a right to dispose of his own as he pleases; for we know that, whatever may be the *second causes* and occasions, nothing can happen to us but according to the will of our heavenly Father. Since what is past cannot be recalled, my part is now to pray, that this, and every other dispensation you meet with, may be sanctified to your soul's good; that you may be more devoted to the God of your life, and have a clearer sense of your saving interest in that kingdom which cannot be shaken, that treasure

which neither thieves nor flames can touch, that better and more enduring substance which is laid up for believers, where Jesus their Head and Savior is. With this in view, you may take joyfully the spoiling of your goods.

I think I can feel for my fiends—but for such as I hope have a right to that promise, that all things shall work together for their good, I soon check my solicitude, and ask myself, Do I love them better, or could I manage more wisely for them, than the Lord does? Can I wish them to be in safer or more compassionate hands than in his? Will he who delights in the prosperity of his servants, afflict them with sickness, losses, and alarms—except he sees there is need of these things? Such thoughts calm the emotions of my mind. I sincerely *condole* you—but the command is, to *rejoice* always in the Lord. The visitation was accompanied with mercy; not such a case as that of the late Lady Molesworth, which made everyone's ears to tingle that heard it. Nor is yours such a case as of some, who in almost every great fire lose their all, and perhaps have no knowledge of God to support them.

Though our first apprehensions were for you, we almost forgot you for a moment when we thought of your next-door neighbor, and the circumstance she was in, so unfit to bear either a fright or a removal. We shall be in much suspense until we hear from you. God grant that you may be able to send us good news, that you are all well, at least as well as can be expected after such a distressing scene. If what has happened should give you more leisure, or more inclination, to spend a little time with us, I think I need not say we shall rejoice to receive you.

Letter 3

September 3, 1767.

My dear Madam,

The vanity of all things below, is confirmed to us by daily experience. Among other proofs, one is, the precariousness of our friendships; and what little things, or rather what nothings, will sometimes produce a coolness, or at least a strangeness, between the dearest friends. How is it that our correspondence has been dropped, and that, after having written two letters since the fire, which removed you from your former residence, I should be still disappointed in my hopes of an answer? On our parts, I hope there has been no abatement of regard; nor can I charge you with anything but remises. Therefore, waving the past, and all apologies on either side, let me beg you to write soon, to tell us how it is with you, and how you have been supported under the various changes you have met with since we saw you last.

I doubt not, but you have met with many exercises. I pray that they may have been sanctified to lead you nearer to the Lord, the fountain of all consolation, who is the only refuge in time of trouble, and whose gracious presence is abundantly able to make up every deficiency and every loss. Perhaps the reading of this may recall to your mind our past conversations, and the subjects of the many letters we have exchanged. I know not in what manner to write after so long an interval. I would hope your silence to us has not been owing to any change of sentiments, which might make such letters as mine less welcome to you. Yet when you had a friend, who I think you believed very nearly interested himself in your welfare, it seems strange, that in a course of two years you should have nothing to communicate. I cannot suppose you have forgotten me; I am sure I have not forgotten you; and therefore I long to hear from you soon,

that I may know how to write; and should this likewise pass unanswered, I must sit down and mourn over my loss.

As to our affairs, I can tell you the Lord has been and is exceedingly gracious to us. Our lives are preserved, our health's continued, and abundance of mercies and blessings on every side—but especially we have to praise him that he is pleased to crown the means and ordinances of his grace, with tokens of his presence. It is my happiness to be fixed among an affectionate people, who make an open profession of the truth as it is in Jesus, and are enabled, in some measure, to show forth its power in their lives and conversation. We walk in peace and harmony. I have reason to say—the Lord Jesus is a good Master, and that the doctrine of free salvation, by faith in his name, is a doctrine according to godliness. For, through mercy, I find it daily effectual to the breaking down the strongholds of sin, and turning the hearts of sinners from dead works to serve the living God. May the Lord give my dear friend to live in the power and consolation of his precious truth!

Seven Letters to a Christian Friend

LETTER 1

November, 1775.

My dear Madam,

Too much of that impatience which you speak of, towards *those who differ from us in some religious sentiments*, is observable on all sides. I do not consider it as the fault of a few individuals, or of this or that party, so much as the effect of that inherent imperfection which is common to our whole race. Anger and scorn are equally unfitting in those who profess to be followers of the meek and lowly

Jesus, and who acknowledge themselves to be both sinful and fallible; but too often something of this *leaven* will be found cleaving to the best characters, and mixed with honest endeavors to serve the best cause.

But thus it was from the beginning; and we have reason to confess that we are no better than the Apostles were, who, though they meant well, manifested once and again a wrong spirit in their zeal; Luke 9:54. Observation and experience contribute, by the grace of God, gradually to soften and sweeten our spirits; but then there will always be ground for mutual forbearance and mutual forgiveness on this head.

However, so far as I may judge of myself, I think this hastiness is not my most besetting sin. I am not indeed an advocate for that *indifference* and *lukewarmness* to the truths of God, which seem to constitute the candor many plead for in the present day. But while I desire to hold fast the sound doctrines of the Gospel towards the persons of my fellow-creatures, I wish to exercise all moderation and benevolence. Protestants or Papists, Socinians or Deists, Jews, Samaritans, or Mohammedans, all are my neighbors; they have all a claim upon me for the *common offices of humanity*.

As to *religion*, they cannot all be right; nor may I compliment them by allowing that the differences between us are but *trivial*, when I believe and know they are important. But I am not to expect others to see with my eyes! I am deeply convinced of the truth of John the Baptist's aphorism in John 3:27, "A man can receive nothing—except it be given him from Heaven." I well know, that the little measure of knowledge I have obtained in the things of God—has not been owing to my own wisdom and teachableness, but to God's goodness. Nor did I learn everything all at once—God has been pleased to exercise

much patience and long-suffering towards me, for the past twenty-seven years—since He first gave me a desire of learning from Himself. He has graciously accommodated Himself to my weakness, borne with my mistakes, and helped me through innumerable prejudices, which, but for His mercy, would have been insuperable hindrances! I have therefore no right to be angry, impatient, or censorious to others, especially as I have still much to learn, and am so poorly influenced by what I seem to know!

I am weary of theological controversies and disputes, and desire to choose for myself, and to point out to others, Mary's part—to sit at Jesus' feet, and to hear his words. And, blessed be his name! So far as I have learned from him, I am favored with a comfortable certainty; I know whom I have believed, and am no longer tossed about by the various winds and tides of opinions, by which I see many are dashed one against the other. But I cannot, I must not, I dare not, be contentious. Only, as a witness for God, I am ready to bear my simple testimony to what I have known of his truth, whenever I am properly called to it.

I agree with you, that some accounted evangelical teachers have too much confined themselves to a few leading and favorite topics. I think this a fault; and believe, when it is constantly so, the auditors are deprived of much edification, which they might receive from a more judicious and comprehensive plan. The *whole* Scripture, as it consists of histories, prophecies, doctrines, precepts, promises, exhortations, admonitions, encouragements, and reproofs, is the proper subject of the Gospel ministry—and every part should in its place be attended to; yet so as that, in every part we exhibit—Jesus should be the capital figure! In Him the prophecies are fulfilled, and the promises established. In Him, in a way of type and emblem, the most important parts of Scripture history have an express reference.

From Him alone—we can receive that life, strength, and encouragement, which are necessary to make obedience either pleasing or practical.

Where there is true spiritual faith in the heart, and in exercise, I believe a person will not so much need a *detail* of what he is to practice—as to be often greatly at a loss without it. Our Savior's commandments are plain and clear in themselves; and that love which springs from faith is the best casuist and commentator to apply and enforce them!

You are pleased to say, "Forgive me if I transgress; I know the place whereon I stand is holy ground." Permit me to assure you, my dear madam, that were I, which I am not, a person of some importance, you would run no hazard of offending me by controverting any of my sentiments. I hold none (knowingly) which I am not willing to submit to Scriptural examination; nor am I afraid of offending you by speaking freely, when you point out my way. I would wrong you, if I thought to please you by palliating or disguising the sentiments of my heart; and if I attempted to do so, you would see through the design, and despise it. There may perhaps be an improper manner of chiming upon the name of Jesus, and I am not for vindicating any impropriety; yet, could I feel what I ought to mean when I pronounce that name, I would not fear mentioning it too often. I am afraid of no excess in thinking highly of it, because I read it is the will of God, that all men should honor the Son as they honor the Father.

Labored explications of the *Trinity* I always avoid. I am afraid of darkening counsel by words without knowledge. *Scripture*, and even *reason* assures me, there is but one God, whose name alone is Jehovah. *Scripture* likewise assures me, that Christ is God, that Jesus is Jehovah. I cannot say that reason assents with equal readiness to

this proposition as to the former. But admitting what the Scripture teaches concerning the evil of sin, the depravity of human nature, the method of salvation, and the offices of the Savior; admitting that God has purposed to glorify, not his *mercy* only, but his *justice*—in the work of redemption; that the blood shed upon the cross is a proper, and adequate atonement for sin; and that the Redeemer is at present the Shepherd of all who believe in Him. We depend upon Him—and He gives us the effectual help which we need. He is intimately acquainted with us—and knows every thought and intent of our hearts. He has His eye always upon us. His ear always open to us. His arm ever stretched out for our relief. We can receive nothing—but what He bestows. We can do nothing—but as He enables us. Nor can we stand a moment—but as He upholds us!

Admitting these and the like promises, with which the Word of God abounds, reason must allow, whatever difficulties may attend the thought, that only he who is God over all, blessed forever, is able or worthy to execute this complicated plan, every part of which requires the exertion of infinite wisdom and almighty power; nor am I able to form any clear, satisfactory, comfortable thoughts of God, suited to awaken my love or engage my trust, but as he has been pleased to reveal himself in the person of Jesus Christ. I believe with the Apostle, that God was once manifested in the flesh upon earth; and that he is now manifested in the flesh in heaven; and that the worship, not only of redeemed sinners, but of the holy angels, is addressed to the Lamb who was slain, and who, in that nature in which he suffered, now exercises universal dominion, and has the government of heaven, earth, and hell, upon his shoulders. This truth is the foundation upon which my hope is built, the fountain from whence I derive all my strength and consolation, and my only encouragement for venturing to the Throne of Grace, for grace to help in time of need.

Until God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind.

But if Immanuel's face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes our sins.

I am, however, free to confess to you, that, through the pride and unbelief remaining in my heart, and the power of Satan's temptations, there are seasons when I find no small perplexity and evil reasoning upon this high point. But it is so absolutely essential to my peace, that I cannot part with it; for I cannot give it up, without giving up all hope of salvation on the one hand, and giving up the Bible, as an unmeaning, contradictory fable, on the other hand. And, through mercy, for the most part, when I am in my right mind, I am as fully persuaded of this truth—as I am of my own existence! But from the exercises I have had about it, I have learned to subscribe to the Apostle's declaration, that "no man can say that Jesus Christ is Lord—but by the Holy Spirit." I am well satisfied it will not be a burden to me at the hour of death, nor be laid to my charge at the day of judgment—that I have thought too highly of Jesus, expected too much from him myself, or labored too much in commending and setting him forth to others, as the Alpha and Omega, the true God and eternal life. On the contrary, alas! alas! my guilt and grief are—that my thoughts of him are so faint, so infrequent, and my commendations of him—so lamentably cold and disproportionate to what they ought to be.

I know not whose letters are rapturous—but I wish mine were more so—not that I am a friend to ungrounded sallies of imagination, flights of carnal passions, or heat without light. But it would be amazing to me, were I not aware of human depravity (of which I consider this as one of the most striking proofs), that those who have any good hope of a saving interest in the Gospel salvation, do not find their hearts (as Dr. Watts expresses it) *all on fire*; and that their very looks do not express a transport of admiration, gratitude, and love, when they consider from what misery they are redeemed, to what happiness they are called, and what a price was paid for their souls. I wish to be more like the Apostle Paul in this respect, who, though he often forms and compounds new words, seems at a loss for any that could suitably describe the emotions of his heart.

I am persuaded you would not object to the just fervors of Scriptural devotion. But this holy flame can seldom be found unsullied in the present life. The temper, constitution, and infirmities of individuals will mix more or less with what they say or do. Allowances must be made for such things in the *present state of infirmity*—for who can hope to be perfectly free from them! Yet—if the heart is right with God, and sincerely affected with the wonders of redeeming love, our gracious High Priest, who knows our weakness, pities and pardons what is amiss, accepts our poor efforts, and gradually teaches us to discern and avoid what is blamable.

The work of grace, in its first stages, I sometimes compare to the lighting of a fire, where for a while there is abundance of smoke—but it burns clearer and clearer. There is often, both in letters and books, what might be very well omitted; but if a love to God and souls is the leading principle, I pass as gentle censure upon the rest as I can, and apply to some eccentric expressions, what Mr. Prior somewhere says

of our civil dissensions in this land of liberty, "A bad effect—but from a noble cause."

LETTER 2

February 16, 1776.

My dear Madam,

It gave me great comfort to find, that what I wrote concerning the divine character of Jesus, as God manifest in the flesh, met with your approbation. This doctrine is, in my view, the great foundation-stone upon which all true religion is built. But, alas! in the present day, it is the stumbling stone and rock of offense, upon which too many, fondly presuming upon their own wisdom, fall and are broken! I am so far from wondering that any should doubt of it, that I am firmly persuaded none can truly believe it, however plainly set forth in Scripture, unless it is revealed to them from Heaven; or, in the Apostle's words, that "no one can call Jesus Christ Lord—but by the Holy Spirit."

There are many who think they believe it, because they have taken it for granted, and never attentively considered the difficulties with which it is attended in the eye of fallen reason. Judging by natural light, it seems impossible to believe that the title of the true God and eternal life, should properly belong to that despised Man who hung dead upon the cross, exposed to the insults of his cruel enemies. I know nothing that can obviate the objections the reasoning mind is ready to form against it—but a real conviction of the sinfulness of sin, and the state of a sinner as exposed to the curse of the Holy Law, and destitute of every plea and hope in himself.

Then the necessity of a Redeemer, and the necessity of this Redeemer's being *Almighty*, is seen and felt, with an evidence which

bears down all opposition; for neither the efficacy of his atonement and intercession, nor his sufficiency to guide, save, protect, and feed those who trust in him, can be conceived of without it. When the eyes of the understanding are opened, the soul made acquainted with and attentive to its own state and needs—he who runs may read this truth; not in a few detached texts of a dubious import, and liable to be twisted and tortured by the arts of criticism—but as interwoven in the very frame and texture of the Bible, and written, as with a sun-beam, throughout the principal parts both of the Old and New Testament.

If Christ is the shepherd and the husband of his people under the Gospel, and if his coming into the world did not abridge those who feared God of the privileges they were entitled to before his appearance, it follows, by undeniable consequence, "that he is God over all blessed forever." For David tell us, that his shepherd was Jehovah; and the husband of the Old Testament church was the Maker and God of the whole earth, the Holy One of Israel, whose name is the Lord Almighty; Psalm 23:1; Isaiah 54:8 with Isaiah 47:4. I agree with you, Madam, that among the many attempts which have been made to prove and illustrate the Scripture doctrine—that the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, are one God—there have been many injudicious, unwarrantable things advanced, which have perplexed instead of instructing, and of which the enemies of the truth have known how to make their advantage. However, there have been tracts upon these sublime subjects which have been written with judgment and an unction, and I believe attended with a blessing. I seem to prefer Mr. Jones's book on the Trinity to any I have seen, because he does little more than state some of the Scripture evidence for it, and draws his inferences briefly and plainly; though even he has admitted a few texts, which may perhaps

be thought not quite full to the point; and he has certainly omitted several of the most express and strongest testimonies.

The best and happiest proof of all, that this doctrine is true in itself and true to us—is the *experience of its effects*. They who know His name will put their trust in Him. Those who are rightly impressed with His astonishing condescension and love, in emptying himself, and submitting to the death of the cross for our sakes—will find themselves under a sweet constraint to love him again, and will feel a little of that emotion of heart which the Apostle expresses in that lively passage, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Gal. 6:14. The knowledge of Christ crucified removes the false appearances by which we have been too long cheated, and shows us the men and the things, the spirit, customs, and maxims of the world—in their just light.

Were I perfectly master of myself and my subject, I would never adduce any text in proof of a doctrine or assertion from the pulpit, which was not direct and conclusive; because if a text is *pressed* into an argument to which it has no proper relation, it rather *encumbers* than supports it, and raises a suspicion that the cause is weak, and better testimonies in its favor cannot be obtained. Some misapplications of this kind have been so long in use, that they pass pretty current, though, if brought to the assay, they would be found not quite sterling; but I endeavor to avoid them to the best of my judgment.

Thus, for instance, I have often heard, Rom. 14:23; "whatever is not of faith is sin," quoted to prove, that without a principle of saving faith we can perform nothing acceptable to God; whereas it seems clear from the context, that faith is there used in another sense, and

signifies a firm persuasion of mind respecting the lawfulness of the action. However, I doubt not but the proposition in itself is strictly true in the other sense, if considered detached from the connection in which it stands; but I should rather choose to prove it from other passages, where it is directly affirmed, as Heb. 11:6; Mat. 12:33.

In such cases, I think hearers should be careful not to be prejudiced against a doctrine, merely because it is not well supported; for perhaps it is capable of solid proof, though the preacher was not so happy as to hit upon that which was most suitable; and extempore preachers may sometimes hope for a little allowance upon this head, from the more candid part of their auditory, and not be made offenders for an *inadvertence* which they cannot perhaps always avoid in the hurry of speaking.

With respect to the application of some passages in the Old Testament to our Lord and Savior, I hold it safest to keep close to the specimens the Apostles have given us, and I would venture with caution if I go beyond their line; yet it is probable they have only given us a specimen, and that there are a great number of passages which have a direct reference to Gospel truths, though we may run some hazard in making out the allusion. If Paul had not gone before me, I would have hesitated to assert that the prohibition, "You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn," was given, not upon the account of oxen—but altogether for our sakes. Nor should I without his assistance have found out, that the history of Sarah and Hagar was a designed allegory, to set forth the difference between the Law and Gospel covenants. Therefore, when I hear ministers tracing some other allusions, I cannot be always sure that they push them too far, though perhaps they are not quite satisfactory to my judgment; for it may be, they have a farther insight into the meaning of the verses than myself.

And I think Scriptures may be sometimes used to advantage, by way of accommodation in popular discourses, and in something of a different sense from what they bear in the place where they stand, provided they are not alleged as proofs—but only to *illustrate* a truth already proved or acknowledged. Though Job's friends and Job himself were mistaken, there are many great truths in their speeches, which, as such, may, I think, stand as the foundation of a discourse. Nay, I either have, or have often intended to borrow, a truth from the mouth even of Satan, "Have you not set a hedge about him?" such a confession extorted from our grand adversary, placing the safety of the Lord's people, under his providential care, in a very striking light.

I perfectly agree with you, Madam, that our religious sensations and exercises are much influenced and tintured by *natural constitution*. And that, therefore, tears and warm emotions on the one hand, or a comparative dryness of spirit on the other—are no sure indications of the real state of the heart. Appearances may agree in different persons, or vary in the same person—from causes which are merely natural. Even a *change of weather* may have some influence in raising or depressing the spirits, where the nerves are very delicate. And I think such people are more susceptible of impressions from the agency of invisible powers, both good and evil; an agency which, though we cannot explain, experience will not permit us to deny.

However, though circumstantials rise and fall—the real difference between *nature* and *grace* remains unalterable. That work of God upon the heart which is sometimes called a *new birth*—or a *new creation*—is as distinct from the highest effects of natural principles or the most specious imitations which education or resolutions can produce, as light is from darkness, or life from death. *Only he who made the world can either make a Christian—or support and carry on his own work.* A thirst after God as our portion; a delight in

Jesus, as the only way to heaven; a renunciation of self and of the world, so far as it is opposite to the spirit of the Gospel—these, and the like fruits of that grace which brings salvation, are not only beyond the power of our fallen nature—but contrary to its tendency; so that we can have no desires of this kind—until they are given us from above; but otherwise, can hardly bear to hear them spoken of, either as excellent or necessary.

LETTER 3

September 17, 1776.

My dear Madam,

We are much indebted to you for your kind thoughts of us. Hitherto I feel no uneasiness about what is before me; but I am afraid my tranquility does not wholly spring from trust in the Lord, and submission to his will—but that a part of it at least is derived from the assurances which my physician gave me, that *my operation* would be neither difficult nor dangerous. I have not much of the *hero* in my constitution. If in great pains or sharp trials I should ever show a befitting fortitude—it must be given me from above. *I desire to leave all with him—in whose hands my ways are—and who has promised me strength according to my day.*

I rejoice that the Lord has not only made you desirous of being useful to others in their spiritual concerns—but has given you in some instances to see, that your desires and attempts have not been in vain. I shall thankfully accept of the commission you are pleased to offer me, and take a pleasure in perusing any papers you may think proper to put into my hands, and offer you my sentiments with that *sincerity* which I am persuaded will be much more agreeable to you than compliments. Though I know there is in general a delicacy and

difficulty in services of this kind, yet with respect to yourself I seem to have nothing to fear.

I have often wished we had more *female pens* employed in the service of the sanctuary. in the article of essay writing, I think many women are qualified to succeed better than most men, having a peculiar easiness of style, which few of us can imitate. I remember you once showed me a paper, together with the corrections and alterations proposed by a gentleman whose opinion you had asked. I thought his corrections had injured it, and given it an air of stiffness which is often observable when learned men write in English. Grammatical rules, as they are called, are wholly derived from the mode of speaking or writing which obtains among those who best understand the language; for the language must be supposed established before any grammar can be made for it; and therefore women who, from the course of their education and life, have had an opportunity of reading the best written books, and conversing with those who speak well, though they do not burden themselves with the *formality of grammar*, have often more skill in the English language than the men who can call every figure of speech by a Latin or Greek name. You may be sure, Madam, I shall not wish your papers suppressed, merely because they were not written by a *learned man*. Language and style, however, are but the *dress. Trifles, however adorned—are trifles still*. A person of spiritual discernment would rather be the author of one page written in the humble garb of Bunyan, upon a serious subject, than to be able to rival the sprightliness and elegance of Lady Montague, unless it could be with a view to edification.

The subjects you propose are important; and with respect to all devotional exercises so called, I perfectly agree with you, that, to be affecting and useful, they must be dictated rather by the *heart* than

by the *head*; and are most likely to influence others, when they are the fruits and transcripts of our own experience. So far as I know, we are but scantily provided with specimens of this sort in print, and therefore I shall be glad to see an accession to the public stock.

Your other thought of *helps to recollection on Saturday evenings*, is, I think, an attempt in which none have been beforehand with you. So that, according to the general appearance, I feel myself disposed to encourage you to do as you have purposed. On the other hand, if I meet with anything, on the perusal of the papers, which in my view may seem to need alteration, I will freely and faithfully point it out.

I can almost smile now—to think you once classed me among the Stoics. If I dare speak with confidence of myself in anything, I think I may lay claim to a little of that pleasing, painful thing—*sensibility*. I need not boast of it; for it has too often been my *snare*, my *sin*, and my *punishment*. Yet I would be thankful for a spice of it, as the Lord's gift, and when rightly exercised it is valuable; and I think I should make but an awkward minister without it, especially here. Where there is this *sensibility* in the natural temper, it will give a *tincture* or *cast* to our religious expression. Indeed I often find this sensibility weakest—where it should be strongest; and have reason to reproach myself that I am no more affected by the character, love, and sufferings of my Lord and Savior, and my own peculiar personal obligations to him. However, my views of religion have been such for many years—make me more likely be deemed an *Enthusiast* than a *Stoic*.

A mere *head-knowledge* derived from a system of sentiments, however true in themselves, is, in my judgment, a poor thing. Nor, on the other hand, am I an admirer of those rapturous sallies which are more owing to a warm imagination, than to a just perception of

the power and importance of Gospel truth. The Gospel addresses both *head* and *heart*; and where it has its proper effect, where it is received as the Word of God, and is clothed with the authority and energy of the Holy Spirit—the *understanding* is enlightened, the *affections* awakened and engaged, the *will* brought into subjection, and the *whole soul* delivered to its impression—as wax to the seal. When this is the case, when the affections do not take the lead, and push forward with a blind impulse—but arise from the *principles of Scripture*, and are governed by them, the more warmth the better.

Yet in this state of infirmity, nothing is perfect; and our natural temperament and disposition will have more influence upon our religious sensations, than we are ordinarily aware. It is well to know how to make proper allowances and abatements upon this head, in the judgment we form both of ourselves and of others. Many good people are *distressed* and alternately *elated*—by frames and feelings, which perhaps are more *constitutional* than properly *religious* experiences.

I dare not tell you, Madam, what I *am*; but I can tell you what I *wish to be*. The love of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, is what I would wish to be the abiding object of my contemplation; not merely to speculate upon it as a doctrine—but so to *feel* it, and my own saving interest in it, as to have my heart filled with its effects, and transformed into its resemblance; that, with this *glorious Exemplar* in my view, I may be animated to a spirit of benevolence, love, and compassion, to all around me; that my love may be primarily fixed upon him who has so loved me; and then, for his sake, diffused to all his children, and to all his creatures. Then, knowing that much is forgiven to me—I would be prompted to the ready exercise of forgiveness, if I have anything against anyone. Then I would be humble, patient, and submissive under all his dispensations; meek,

gentle, forbearing, and kind to my fellow-worms. Then I would be active and diligent in improving all my talents and powers in his service, and for his glory; and live not to myself—but to him who loved me and gave himself for me!

LETTER 4

Nov. 29, 1776.

My dear Madam,

You need not be told, that though there are perhaps supposable extremities in which *SELF* would prevail over all considerations; yet in general it is more easy to allow *SELF* our own case, than in the case of those whom we dearly love; for through such a medium our apprehensions possibly receive the idea of the trouble enlarged beyond its just dimensions; and it would sit lighter upon us if it were properly our own case, for then we would feel it all, and there would be no room for imagination to exaggerate.

But though I feel grief, I trust the Lord has mercifully preserved me from *impatience* and *murmuring*, and that, in the midst of all the pleadings of flesh and blood, there is a something within me that aims to say, without reserve or exception, "*Not my will—but Yours be done!*"

It is a comfortable consideration, that he with whom we have to do, our great High Priest, who once put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself, and now forever appears in the presence of God for us—is not only possessed of sovereign authority and infinite power—but wears our very nature, and feels and exercises in the highest degree—those tenderness and commiserations, which I conceive are essential to *humanity in its perfect state*. The whole history of his wonderful life is full of inimitable instances of this kind. His *affections* were

moved—before his *arm* was exerted. He condescended to mingle tears with mourners, and wept over distresses which he intended to relieve. He is still the same in his exalted state; compassions dwell within his heart. In a way inconceivable to us—but consistent with his supreme dignity and perfection of happiness and glory—he still feels for his people.

When Saul persecuted the *members* upon earth, the *Head* complained from heaven; and sooner shall the most tender mother sit insensible and inattentive to the cries and needs of her infant—than the Lord Jesus be an unconcerned spectator of his suffering children. No, with the eye, and the ear, and the heart of a *friend*—he attends to their sorrows; he counts their sighs, puts their tears in his bottle; and when our spirits are overwhelmed within us—he knows our path, and adjusts the time, the measure of our trials, and everything that is necessary for our present support and seasonable deliverance, with the same unerring wisdom and accuracy as he weighed the mountains in scales and hills in a balance, and meted out the heavens with a span!

Still more, besides his *benevolent* sympathy—he has an *experimental* sympathy. He knows our sorrows, not merely as he knows all things—but as one who has been in our situation, and who, though without sin himself, endured when upon earth, inexpressibly more for us than he will ever lay upon us! He has sanctified poverty, pain, disgrace, temptation, and death—by passing through these states! And in whatever states his people are, they may by faith have fellowship with him in their sufferings, and he will by sympathy and love have fellowship and interest with them in theirs.

What then shall we *fear*—or of what shall we *complain*—when all our concerns are written upon his heart, and their management, to the

very hairs of our head, are under his care and providence; when he pities us more than we can do ourselves, and has engaged his almighty power to sustain and relieve us? However, as he is *compassionate* and *tender*—he is *wise* also. He loves us—but especially with regard to our best interests. If there were not something in our hearts and our situation which required discipline and medicine, he so delights in our prosperity, that we would never be in heaviness. The innumerable comforts and mercies with which he enriches even those we call *darker days*, are sufficient proofs that he does not willingly grieve us. But when he sees a need-be for chastisement, he will not withhold it, because he loves us; on the contrary, that is the very reason *why* he afflicts us! He will put his silver into the fire to purify it; but he sits by the furnace as a refiner, to direct the process, and to secure the end he has in view—that we may neither suffer too much nor suffer in vain!

LETTER 5

December, 1776.

My dear Madam,

I have often preached to others of *the benefits of affliction*; but my own path for many years has been so smooth, and my trials, though I have not been without trials, comparatively so light and few—that I have seemed to myself to speak by *rote* upon a subject of which I had not a proper feeling. Yet the many exercises of my poor afflicted people, and the sympathy the Lord has given me with them in their troubles—has made "*the benefits of affliction*" a frequent and favorite topic of my ministry among them. The *advantages* of afflictions, when the Lord is pleased to employ them for the good of his people, are many and great. Permit me to mention a few of them;

and may the Lord grant that we may all find those blessed ends answered to ourselves, by the trials he is pleased to appoint us.

Afflictions quicken us to prayer. It is a pity it should be so; but experience testifies, that a long course of ease and prosperity, without painful changes—has an unhappy tendency to make us cold and formal in our secret worship. But *troubles* rouse our spirits, and constrain us to call upon the Lord in good earnest—when we feel a need of that help which we only can have from his almighty arm.

Afflictions are useful, and in a degree necessary, to keep alive in us—a conviction of the vanity and unsatisfying nature of the present *world*, and all its enjoyments; to remind us that this world is not our rest, and to call our thoughts upwards, where our true treasure is, and where our heart ought to be. When things go on much to our wish, our hearts are too prone to say, "It is good to be here!" It is probable, that had Moses, when he came to invite Israel to Canaan, found them in prosperity—that they would have been very unwilling to move out of Egypt; but the afflictions they were in—made his message welcome. Thus the Lord, by pain, sickness, and disappointments, by breaking our cisterns and withering our gourds—weakens our attachment to this world, and makes the thought of leaving it, more easy and more desirable.

A child of God cannot but greatly desire a more enlarged and *experimental acquaintance with his holy Word*; and this attainment is greatly promoted by our trials. The far greater part of the promises in Scripture, are made and suited to a state of affliction; and, though we may *believe* they are true, we cannot so well *know* their sweetness, power, and suitableness, unless we ourselves are in a state to which they refer! The Lord says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you." Now, until the day of trouble comes,

such a promise is like a city of refuge to an Israelite, who, not having slain a man, was in no danger of the avenger of blood. He had a privilege near him, of which he knew not the use and value—because he was not in the case for which it was provided. But some can say, I not only believe this promise upon the authority of the speaker—but I can set my seal to it! I *have* been in trouble; I took this course for relief, and I was not disappointed. The Lord truly heard and delivered me. Thus afflictions likewise give occasion of our knowing and noticing more of the Lord's wisdom, power, and goodness, in supporting and relieving us—than we would otherwise have known.

I have not time to take another sheet, must therefore contract my homily.

Afflictions evidence to ourselves, and manifest to others, the *reality of grace*. When we suffer as Christians, exercise some measure of that patience and submission, and receive some measure of these supports and supplies, which the Gospel requires and promises to believers—we are more confirmed that we have not taken up with mere notions; and others may be convinced that we do not follow cunningly devised fables.

Afflictions likewise strengthen us—by the *exercise our graces*. As our limbs and natural powers would be feeble if not called to daily exertion—so the graces of the Spirit would languish, without something which was provided to draw them out to use.

Lastly, afflictions are honorable, as they advance our conformity to Jesus our Lord, who was a man of sorrows for our sake. Methinks, if we might go to heaven without suffering, we would be unwilling to desire it. Why should we ever wish to go by any other path to heaven—than that which Jesus has consecrated and endeared, by his own example? Especially as his people's sufferings are not *penal*—there is

no wrath in them. The cup he puts in their hands is very different from that which he drank for their sakes, and is only *medicinal* to promote their chief good. Here I must stop; but the subject is fruitful, and might be pursued through a quire of paper.

LETTER 6

August, 1778.

My dear Madam,

Topics of consolation are at hand in abundance; they are familiar to your mind; and was I to fill the sheet with them, I could suggest nothing but what you already know. Then are they consolatory indeed—only when the Lord himself is pleased to apply them to the heart! This he has promised, and therefore we are encouraged to expect it. This is my prayer for you. I sincerely sympathize with you; I cannot comfort you—but he can; and I trust he will. How impertinent would it be to advise you to forget or suspend the feelings which such a stroke must excite! Who can help feeling! Nor is sensibility in itself sinful.

Christian resignation is very different from that stoic stubbornness which is most easily practiced by those unamiable characters whose regards center wholly in *SELF*; nor could we in a proper manner exercise submission to the will of God under our trials—if we did not *feel* them. He who knows our frame is pleased to allow, that afflictions for the present are not joyous—but grievous. But to those who fear him—he is near at hand, to support their spirits, to moderate their grief, and in the outcome to sanctify it; so that they shall come out of the furnace *refined*—more humble, and more spiritual.

There is, however, a part assigned us—we are to pray for *divine help* when in need; and we are not willfully to give way to the impression of *overwhelming sorrow*. We are to endeavor to turn our thoughts to such considerations as are suited to alleviate it—our deserts as sinners, the many mercies we are still indulged with, the still greater afflictions which many of our fellow-creatures endure, and, above all, the sufferings of Jesus, that Man of Sorrows, who made himself intimately acquainted with grief for our sakes.

When the will of the Lord is manifested to us by the event, we are to look to him for grace and strength; and be still—and know that he is God, that he has a right to dispose of us and ours as he pleases, and that in the exercise of this right—he is most certainly *good* and wise.

We often complain of our losses; but the expression is rather improper. Strictly speaking, we can lose nothing, because we have no real property in anything. Our earthly comforts are all lent to us by our good and gracious God; and when recalled, we ought to return and resign them with thankfulness—to Him who has let them remain so long in our hands! But, as I said above, I do not mean to enlarge in this strain.

I hope the Lord, the only comforter, will bring such thoughts with warmth and efficacy upon your mind. Your wound, while fresh, is painful; but *faith, prayer, and time*, will, I trust, gradually render it tolerable. There is something fascinating in *grief*—painful as it is, we are prone to indulge it, and to brood over the thoughts and circumstances which are suited (like fuel to fire) to heighten and prolong it! When the Lord afflicts, it is his design that we should grieve. But in this, as in all other things, there is a certain *moderation* which befits a Christian, and which only grace can teach. And grace teaches us, not by books or by hearsay—but by

experimental lessons. All beyond this—should be avoided and guarded against as sinful and hurtful.

Grief, when indulged and excessive, preys upon the spirits, injures health, indisposes us for duty, and causes us to shed tears which deserve more tears. This is a weeping world! Sin has filled it with thorns and briars, with crosses and calamities. This world is a great hospital, resounding with groans in every quarter. This world is as a field of battle, where many are falling around us continually; and it is more astonishing that we *escape* so well—than that we are *sometimes wounded*. We must have some share of affliction—it is the unavoidable lot of our nature and state; it is likewise needful in point of discipline. The Lord will certainly chasten those whom he loves, though others may seem to pass for a time with impunity. That is a sweet, instructive, and important passage, Heb. 12:5-11. It is so *plain*, that it needs no comment; so *full*, that a comment would but weaken it. May the Lord inscribe it upon your heart, my dear Madam, and upon mine as well!

LETTER 7

November, 1778.

My dear Madam,

Your compelling letter raised in me a variety of emotions when I first received it, and has revived them this morning while perusing it again. I have mourned and rejoiced with you—and felt pain and pleasure in succession, as you enlarged the subject. However, the weight of *your grief* I was willing to consider as a thing that is past; and the thought that you had been mercifully supported under it, and brought through it, that you were restored home in safety, and that at the time of writing you were tolerably well and composed, and

joyful, upon the whole. Now I am more disposed to congratulate you, and join you in praising the Lord for the mercies you enumerate, than to prolong my condolence upon the mournful parts of your letter.

Repeated trying occasions have made me well acquainted with the anxious inquiries, with which the busy poring mind is apt to pursue *departed friends*—it can hardly be otherwise under some circumstances. I have found *prayer* the best relief. I have had the most comfort, when I have been enabled to *resign* the whole concern into His hands, whose thoughts and ways, whose power and goodness, are infinitely superior to our feeble conceptions!

I consider, in such cases, that the great *Redeemer* can save to the uttermost—and the great *Teacher* can communicate light, and impress truth, when and how he pleases. I trust the power of his grace and compassion, will hereafter triumphantly appear, in many instances, of people, who, on their dying beds, and in their last moments, have been, by his mercy, constrained to feel the importance and reality of truths which they did not properly understand and attend to in the hour of health and prosperity. Such a beneficial change I have frequently, or at least more than once, twice, or thrice, been an eye-witness to, accompanied with such evidence as, I think, has been quite satisfactory. And who can say such a change may not often take place, when the person who is the subject of it is too much enfeebled to give an account to bystanders of what is transacting in his mind! Thus I have encouraged my hope. But the best satisfaction of all is, to be duly impressed with the voice that says, "*Be still—and know that I am God.*" These words direct us, not only to his sovereignty, his undoubted right to do what he will with his own—but to all his adorable and amiable perfections, by which he has manifested himself to us in the Son of his love.

As I am not a Sadducee, the account you give of the **music** which entertained you on the road, does not put my dependence either upon your veracity or your judgment to any trial. We live upon the confines of the invisible world, or rather, perhaps, in the midst of it. That unseen agents have a power of operating on our minds, at least upon that mysterious faculty we call *the imagination*, is with me not merely a point of opinion, or even of faith—but of experience. That evil spirits can, when permitted, disturb, distress, and defile us, I know—as well as I know that the fire can burn me. And though their interposition is perhaps more easily and certainly distinguishable, yet, from analogy, I conclude that *holy angels* are equally willing, and equally able, to employ their kind offices for our relief and comfort.

I have formed in my mind a kind of system upon this subject, which, for the most part, I keep pretty much to myself; but I can entrust my thoughts to you as they occasionally offer. I apprehend that some people (those particularly who rank under the class of *nervous*) are more open and accessible to these impressions than others, and probably the same person more so at some times—than others. And though we frequently distinguish between *imaginary* and *real* (which is one reason why nervous people are so seldom pitied), yet an impression upon the imagination may, as to the agent that produces it, and to the person that receives it—be as much a reality as any of the sensible objects around him; though a bystander, not being able to share in the perception, may account it a *mere whim*, and suppose it might be avoided or removed by an act of the will.

Nor have any a right to withhold their assent to what the Scriptures teach, and many sober people declare, of this invisible agency, merely because we cannot answer the questions, *How?* or *Why?* The thing may be certain—though we cannot easily explain it. And there

may be just and important reasons for it—though we are not be able to assign them. If what you *heard*, or (which, in my view, is much the same) what you *thought* you heard, had a tendency to compose your spirit, and to encourage your application to the Lord for help, at the time when you were about to stand in need of especial assistance—then there is a sufficient and suitable reason assigned for it at once, without looking farther. It would be dangerous to make such **impressions** a rule of duty; but if they strengthen us and assist us in the performance of what we know to be our duty—we may be thankful for them.

You have taken leave of the scenes of your younger life—a few years sooner than you must have done, if the late dispensation had not taken place. *All* must be left soon—for all below is polluted, and in its best state—is too scanty to afford us real happiness. If we are believers in Jesus, all which we leave is a *mere nothing*, compared with what we shall obtain. To exchange a dungeon for a palace, earth for heaven—will call for no self-denial when we stand upon the threshold of eternity, and shall have a clearer view than we have now of the *vanity* of what we are leaving—and the glory of what we are obtaining! The little *losses* and *changes* we meet with in our way through life—are designed to remind us of, and prepare us for the great change which awaits us at the end of it. May the Lord grant that we may find His mercy in that solemn hour!

Four letters to a friend

LETTER 1

April 17, 1776.

Dear Sir,

By this time I hope you are both returned in peace, and happy together in your stated favored tract; rejoicing in the name of Jesus yourselves, and rejoicing to see the savor of it spreading like a precious perfume among the people. Every day I hope you find the prejudices of the people wearing off, and more disposed to hear the words of life. The Lord has given you a fine first-fruits, which I trust will prove the pledge of a plentiful harvest. In the mean time he will enable you to sow the seed in patience, leaving the event in his hands. Though it does not spring up visibly at once, it will not be lost. I think He would not have sent you—if He had not a people there to call; but they can only come forth to view as He is pleased to bring them. Satan will try to hinder and disturb you; but he held by a chain which he cannot break, nor go a step farther than he is permitted.

And if you have been instrumental to the conversion of but a few, in those few you have an ample reward already for all the difficulties you have or can ever meet with. It is more honorable and important to be an instrument of saving one soul, than to rescue a whole kingdom from temporal ruin! Let us therefore, while we earnestly desire to be more useful, not forget to be thankful for what the Lord has been pleased already to do for us; and let us expect, knowing whose servants we are, and what a Gospel we preach, to see some new miracles wrought from day to day. For indeed, every real conversion may be accounted miraculous, being no less than an immediate exertion of that power which made the heavens, and commanded the light to shine out of darkness.

I wish I had more of that clear air and sunshine you speak of, that with you I might have more distinct views of the land of promise. I

cannot say my prospect is greatly clouded by doubts of my reaching it at last; but then there is such a languor and deadness hangs upon my mind, that it is almost amazing to me how I can entertain any hopes at all. It seems, if doubting could ever be reasonable, there is no one who has greater reason for doubting than myself. But I know not how to doubt—when I consider the faithfulness, grace, and compassion of Him who has promised. If it could be proved that Christ had not died, or that he did not speak the words which are ascribed to him in the Gospel, or that he is not able to make them good, or that his word cannot safely be taken—in any of these cases I would doubt—and lie down in despair.

LETTER 2

July 15, 1777.

My dear Sir,

I begin with congratulations first to you and your wife on your safe journey and good passage over the formidable Humber River. Your wife has another river to cross (may it be many years before she approaches the bank), over which there is no bridge. Perhaps at seasons she may think of it with that reluctance which she felt before she saw the Humber; but as her fears were then agreeably disappointed, and she found the experiment, when called to make it, neither terrifying nor dangerous, so I trust she will find it in the other case.

We should reason: God guides and guards me through life; he gives me new mercies, and new proofs of his power and care every day; and, therefore, when I come to die he will forsake me, and let me be the sport of winds and waves. Indeed, the Lord does not deserve such hard thoughts at our hands, as we are prone to form of him. But

notwithstanding we make such returns, he is and will be gracious, and shame us out of our unkind, ungrateful, unbelieving fears at last.

If, after my repeated kind reception at your house, I should always be teasing your wife with suspicions of her goodwill, and should tell everybody I saw, that I truly believed the next time I went to see her she would shut the door in my face and refuse me admittance—would she not be grieved, offended, and affronted? Would she not think, "What reason can he assign for this treatment? He knows I did everything in my power to assure him of a welcome, and told him so over and over again. Does he count me a deceiver? Yes, he does! I see his friendship is not worth preserving; so farewell! I will seek friends among such as believe my words and actions." Well, my dear madam, I make no doubt but you will treat me kindly next time, as you did the last. But think—is not the Lord as worthy of being trusted as yourself? and are not his invitations and promises as hearty and as honest as yours? Let us, therefore, beware of giving way to such thoughts of him, as we could hardly forgive in our dearest friends, if they should harbor the like of us!

Our friend is very busy seeking that precious piece of furniture, called a *wife*. May the Lord direct and bless his choice. "Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? She is worth more than precious rubies!" Proverbs 31:10. In Captain Cook's voyage to the South Sea, some fish were caught which looked as well as others—but those who ate of them were poisoned! Alas! for the poor man who catches a poisonous wife! There are many such to be met with in the matrimonial seas, who look passing well to the eye. But a marriage to them proves baneful to domestic peace, and hurtful to the life of grace.

I know several people, including myself, who have great reason to be thankful to Him who sent the fish, with the money in its mouth, to Peter's hook. He has secretly instructed and guided us where to angle; and if we have caught prizes, we owe it not to our own skill, much less to our deserts—but to His goodness! "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised!" Proverbs 31:30

LETTER 3

July 4, 1777.

My dear Sir,

Your poor little boy! It is mercy indeed, that he recovered from such a severe mishap. The Lord wounded—and the Lord healed. I ascribe, with you, what the world calls **accidents** to Him, and believe, that without His permission, for wise and good ends—a child can no more pull a bowl of boiling water on itself—than it could pull the moon out of its orbit!

Why does God permit such things? He does these things—to remind us of the uncertainty of life and all creature-comforts; to make us afraid of cleaving too close to pretty toys, which are so precarious, that often while we look at them they vanish; to lead us to a more entire dependence upon himself; that we might never judge ourselves or our concerns safe from outward appearances only—but that the Lord is our keeper, and were not His eye upon us—a thousand dangers, and painful changes, which we can neither foresee nor prevent—are lurking about us every step, ready to break in upon us every hour!

"Men are but children of a larger growth." How many are laboring and planning in the pursuit of things, the outcome of which, if they

obtain them, will be but like pulling scalding water upon their own heads! They must have the bowl by all means—but they are not aware what is in it—until they feel it!

LETTER 4

September 7, 1777.

Dear Sir,

I hope that your minister will be restored to you again before long, and that he and many of your place will rejoice long in each other. Those are favored places which are blessed with a sound and faithful Gospel ministry, if the people know and consider the value of their privileges, and are really desirous of profiting by them; but the kingdom of God is not in word—but in power.

I hope those who profess the Gospel with you—will wrestle in prayer for grace to walk worthy of it. A minister's hands are strengthened when he can point to his people as so many living proofs that the doctrines he preaches are doctrines according to godliness; when they walk in mutual love; when each one, in their several places, manifests a humble, spiritual, upright, conduct; when they are Christians, not only at church—but in the family, the shop, and the field; when they fill up their relations in life, as husbands or wives, masters or servants, parents or children, according to the rule of the Word; when they are evidently a people separated from the world while conversant in it, and are careful to let their light shine before men, not only by *talking*—but by *acting* as the disciples of Christ; when they go on steadily, not by fits and starts, prizing the means of grace without resting in them. When it is thus, we can say, "Now we really live—if you stand fast in the Lord. Then we come forth with

pleasure, and our service is our delight, and we are encouraged to hope for an increasing blessing!"

But if the people in whom we have rejoiced sink into formality or a worldly spirit; if they have dissensions and jealousies among themselves; if they act improperly—then our hearts are wounded and our zeal damped, and we know not how to speak with liberty. It is my heart's desire and prayer for you, that, whether I see you, or else be absent from you, I may know that you stand fast in one spirit and one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel.

Four Letters to a Widow

Letter 1

March 12, 1774.

My dear Madam,

My heart is full, yet I must restrain it. Many thoughts which crowd my mind, and would have vent were I writing to another person, would to you be unseasonable. I write not to remind you of what you have lost—but of what you have, which you cannot lose. May the Lord put a word into my heart that may be acceptable; and may his good Spirit accompany the perusal, and enable you to say with the Apostle, that, as *sufferings* abound, *consolations* also abound by Jesus Christ. Indeed I can sympathize with you. I remember too the delicacy of your frame, and the tenderness of your natural spirits; so that were you not interested in the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel—I would be ready to fear you must sink

under your trial. But I have some faint conceptions of the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of the Lord, and may address you in the king's words to Daniel, "Your God whom you serve continually—he will deliver you."

Motives for *resignation to his will* abound in his Word; but it is an additional and crowning mercy, that he has promised to apply and enforce them in time of *need*. He has said, "My grace shall be sufficient for you;" and "as your day is—so shall your strength be." This I trust you have already experienced. The Lord is so *rich*, and so *good*, that he can by a glance of thought compensate his children for whatever his wisdom sees fit to deprive them of. If he gives them a lively sense of what he has delivered them from—and prepared for them—or of what he himself submitted to endure for their sakes—they find at once light springing up out of darkness—hard things become easy—and bitter sweet.

I remember to have read of a good man in the last century (probably you may have met with the story), who, when his beloved and only son lay ill, was for some time greatly anxious about the event. One morning he staid longer than usual in his closet. while he was there his son died. When he came out his family were afraid to tell him; but, like David, he perceived it by their looks; and when upon inquiry they said it was so, he received the news with a composure that surprised them. But he soon explained the reason, by telling them, that for such discoveries of the Lord's goodness as he had been favored with that morning—he could be content to lose a son every day.

Yes, Madam, though every *stream* must fail, the *fountain* is still full and still flowing. All the comfort you ever received in your dear husband was from the Lord, who is abundantly able to comfort you

still. Your husband has gone but a little before you. May your faith anticipate the joyful and glorious meeting you will shortly have in the heavenly world. Then your worship and converse together will be to unspeakable advantage, without imperfection, interruption, abatement, or end! Then all *tears* shall be wiped away, and every *cloud* removed; and then you will see, that all your concernments here below (the late afflicting dispensation not excepted), were appointed and adjusted by infinite *wisdom* and infinite *love*!

The Lord, who knows our frame, does not expect or require that we should aim at a *stoic indifference* under his visitations. He allows, that afflictions are at present not joyous—but grievous; yes, he wept with his mourning friends when Lazarus died. But he has graciously provided for the prevention of that anguish and bitterness of sorrow, which is, upon such occasions, the portion of such as live without God in the world; and has engaged, that all shall work together for good, and yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. May he bless you with a sweet serenity of spirit, and a cheerful hope of the glory that shall shortly be revealed.

I intimated, that I would not trouble you with my own sense and share of this loss. If you remember the great kindness I always received from your husband and yourself, as often as opportunity afforded; and if you will believe me possessed of any sensibility or gratitude, you will conclude that my concern is not small. I feel likewise for the public. Will it be a consolation to you, madam, to know, that you do not mourn alone? A character so exemplary as a friend, a counselor, a Christian, and a minister, will be long and deeply regretted; and many will join with me in praying, that you, who are most nearly interested, may be signally supported.

We join in most affectionate respects and condolence. May the Lord bless you and keep you, lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you peace!

Letter 2

April 8, 1775.

My dear Madam,

I have long and often purposed waiting upon you with a second letter, though one thing or other still caused delay; for though I could not but wish to hear from you, I was far from making that a condition of my writing. If you have leisure and desire to favor me with a line now and then, it will give us much pleasure; but if not, it will be a sufficient inducement with me to write, to know that you give me liberty, and that you will receive my letters in good part. At the same time I must add, that my various engagements will not permit me to break in upon you so often as my sincere affection would otherwise prompt me to do.

I heartily desire to praise the Lord on your behalf. I am persuaded that his goodness to you in supporting you under a trial so sharp in itself, and in the circumstances that attended it—has been an encouragement and comfort to many. It is in such apparently severe times, that the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of the Lord, and the power and proper effects of his precious Gospel, are most eminently displayed. I would hope, and I do believe, that the knowledge of your case has animated some of the Lord's people against those anxious fears which they sometimes feel when they look upon their earthly comforts with too careful an eye, and their hearts are ready to sink at the thought. What should I do, and how should I behave, were the

Lord pleased to take away my desire with a stroke? But we see he can supply their absence, and afford us superior comforts without them.

The Gospel reveals one thing needful—the pearl of great price; and supposes, that they who possess this are provided for, against all events, and have ground of unshaken hope, and a source of never-failing consolation under every change they can meet with during their pilgrimage state. When his people are enabled to set their seal to this, not only in theory, when all things go smooth—but practically, when called upon to pass through the *fire* and *water*—then his grace is glorified in them and by them. Then it appears, both to themselves and to others, that they have neither followed cunningly devised fables, nor amused themselves with empty notions. Then they know in themselves, and it is evidenced to others—that God is with them in truth.

In this view a believer, when in some good measure divested from that narrow selfish disposition which cleaves so close to us by nature, will not only *submit* to trials—but *rejoice* in them, notwithstanding the feelings and reluctance of the flesh. For if I am redeemed from misery by the blood of Jesus; and if he is now preparing me a mansion near himself, that I may drink of the *rivers of pleasure* at his right hand for evermore; the question is not (at least ought not to be), "how may I pass through life with the least inconvenience?" but, "how may my little span of life be made most subservient to the praise and glory of Him who loved me, and gave himself for me?"

Where the Lord gives this desire—he will gratify it; and as afflictions, for the most part, afford the fairest opportunities of this kind, therefore it is, that those whom he is pleased eminently to honor are usually called, at one time or another, to the heaviest trials; not

because he loves to grieve them—but because he hears their prayers, and accepts their desires of doing him service in the world.

The *post of honor* in war is so called, because attended with difficulties and dangers which but few are supposed equal to; yet generals usually allot these hard services to their favorites and friends, who on their parts eagerly accept them as tokens of favor and marks of confidence. Should we, therefore, not account it an honor and a privilege, when the Captain of our salvation assigns us a difficult post? He can and does (which no earthly commander can) inspire his soldiers with wisdom, courage, and strength, suitable to their situation. 2Co. 12:9-10. I am acquainted with a few who have been led thus into the forefront of the battle. They suffered much; but I have never heard them say they suffered too much; for the Lord stood by them and strengthened them. Go on, my dear madam. In a little while Jesus will wipe away all tears from your eyes; you will see your beloved husband again, and he and you will rejoice together forever!

Letter 3

October 24, 1775.

My dear Madam,

The manner in which you mention my *Omicron's letters*, I hope, will rather humble me, than puff me up. Your favorable acceptance of them, if alone, might have the latter effect; but alas! I feel myself so very *defective* in practicing those things, the importance of which I endeavored to point out to others, that I almost appear to myself to be one of those who do not practice what I preach. I find it much easier to speak to the hearts of others—than to my own. Yet I have cause beyond many—to bless God, that he has given me some idea of

what a Christian ought to be, and I hope a real desire of being one myself; but truly I have attained but a very little way.

A friend hinted to me, that the character I have given of "C", or "Grace in the full ear", must be from my own experience, or I could not have written it. To myself, however, it appears otherwise; but I am well convinced, that the state of "C" is attainable, and more to be desired than mountains of gold and silver! But I find you complain likewise; though it appears to me, and I believe to all who know you, that the Lord has been peculiarly gracious to you, in giving you much of the Spirit in which He delights, and by which His name and the power of His Gospel are glorified. It seems, therefore, that *we are not competent judges either of ourselves or of others*.

I take it for granted, that they are the most excellent Christians—who are most abased in their own eyes. But lest you should think upon this ground that I am something, because I can say so many humiliating things of myself, I must prevent your over-rating me, by assuring you, that my confessions rather express what I know I *ought* to think of myself, than what I actually *do* think of myself.

Naturalists suppose, that if the matter of which the earth is formed were condensed as much as it is capable of, it would occupy but a very small space. In proof of which they observe, that pane of glass, which appears smooth and impervious to us, must be exceedingly *porous* in itself; since in every point it receives and transmits the rays of light; and yet gold, which is the most solid substance we are acquainted with, is but about eight times heavier than glass, which is made up (if I may so say) of nothing but pores. In like manner I conceive, that inherent grace, when it is *dilated*, and appears to the greatest advantage in a sinner, would be found to be very small and

inconsiderable, if it was condensed, and absolutely separated from every mixture.

The highest attainments in grace in this life are very inconsiderable, compared with what should properly result from our relation and obligations to a God of infinite holiness. The nearer we approach to him—the more we are sensible of this. While we only hear of God as it were by the ear—we seem to be something. But when, as in the case of Job, he reveals himself more sensibly to us, Job's language becomes ours, and the height of our attainment is, to "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes!"

There certainly is a real, though secret, a sweet, though mysterious, *communion of saints*, by virtue of their common union with Jesus. Feeding upon the same bread, drinking of the same fountain, waiting at the same mercy-seat, and aiming at the same ends, they have fellowship one with another, though at a distance. Who can tell how often the Holy Spirit, who is equally present with them all, touches the hearts of two or more of his children at the same instant, so as to excite a sympathy of pleasure, prayer, or praise, on each other's account? It revives me sometimes in a dull and dark hour to reflect, that the Lord has in mercy given me a place in the hearts of many of his people; and perhaps some of them may be speaking to him on my behalf—when I have hardly power to utter a word for myself. For kind services of this sort, I persuade myself I am often indebted to you. O that I were enabled more fervently to repay you in the same way! I can say, that I attempt it. I love and honor you greatly, and your concernments are often upon my mind.

We spent most of a week with *Mr. B.* since we returned from London, and he has been once here. We have reason to be very thankful for his connection. I find but few like minded with him, and

his family is filled with the grace and peace of the Gospel. I never visit them—but I meet with something to humble, quicken, and edify me. O! what will heaven be, where there shall be all who love the Lord Jesus, and they alone; where all imperfection, and whatever now abates or interrupts their joy in their Lord and in each other, shall cease forever! There at least I hope to meet you, and spend an eternity with you, in admiring the riches and glory of redeeming love!

Letter 4

October 28, 1777.

My dear Madam,

What can I say for myself, to let your compelling letter remain so long unanswered, when your kind solicitude for us induced you to write? I am ashamed of the delay. You would have heard from me immediately, had I been at home. But I have reason to be thankful that we were providentially called to London a few days before the fire; so that my wife was mercifully preserved from the alarm and shock she must have felt, had she been upon the spot. Your letter followed me hither, and was in my possession more than a week before my return. I purposed to write to you every day—but indeed I was much hurried and engaged. Yet I am not excused. I ought to have saved time from my meals or my sleep, rather than appear negligent or ungrateful.

The fire devoured twelve houses—and it was a mercy, and almost a miracle, that the whole town was not destroyed; which must, humanly speaking, have been the case, had not the night been calm, as two thirds of the buildings were thatched. No lives were lost; no person considerably hurt; and I believe the contributions of the

benevolent will prevent the loss from being greatly felt. It was at the distance of a quarter of a mile from my house.

Your letter points out a subject for me to address. Yet at the same time, you lay me under a difficulty. I would not willingly offend you, and I hope the Lord has taught me not to aim at saying *flattering* things. I deal not in flattery, and *religious flattery* is the most inappropriate of any.

But why might I not express my sense of the grace of God, manifested in you as well as in another? I believe our hearts are all alike—destitute of every good, and prone to every evil! Like money from the same mint—they bear the same impression of total depravity; but *grace* makes a difference, and grace deserves the praise. Perhaps it ought not greatly to displease you, that others do, and must, and will think better of you than you do of yourself. If I do, how can I help it, when I form my judgment entirely from what you say and write? I cannot consent, that you should seriously appoint me to examine and judge of your state. I thought you knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, what your views and desires are. Yes, you express them in your letter, in full agreement with what the Scripture declares of the *principles, desires, and feelings* of a Christian. It is true that you feel contrary principles, that you are *conscious of defects and defilements*; but it is equally true, that you could not be right, if you did not feel these things. To be *conscious* of them, and *humbled* for them—is one of the surest marks of grace; and to be more deeply sensible of them than formerly—is the best evidence of growth in grace. But when the enemy would tempt us to doubt and distrust, because we are not *perfect*—then he fights, not only against our peace—but against the honor and faithfulness of our dear Lord. Our *righteousness* is in Jesus; and our hope depends, not upon the

exercise of grace in us—but upon the fullness of grace and love in him, and upon *his* obedience unto death.

There is, my dear madam, a difference between the holiness of a sinner—and that of an angel. The angels have never sinned, nor have they tasted of redeeming love. they have no inward conflicts, no law of sin warring in their members; their obedience is perfect; their happiness is complete. Yet if I be found among redeemed sinners, I need not wish to be an angel. Perhaps God is not less glorified by your obedience, and, not to shock you, I will add by mine, than by Gabriel's. It is a mighty manifestation of his grace indeed—when it can live, and act, and conquer in such hearts as ours; when, in defiance of an evil *nature* and an evil *world*, and all the force and subtlety of *Satan*—a weak worm is still upheld, and enabled not only to *climb*—but to *thresh* the mountains; when a *small spark* is preserved through storms and floods. In these circumstances, the work of grace is to be estimated, not merely from its imperfect appearance—but from the difficulties it has to struggle with and overcome. And therefore our holiness does not consist in great attainments—but in spiritual desires, in hungering, thirstiness, and mournings; in humiliation of heart, poverty of spirit, submission, meekness; in hearty admiring thoughts of Jesus, and dependence upon him alone for all we need. Indeed these may be said to be great attainments; but they who have most of them are most sensible that they, in and of themselves, *are* nothing, *have* nothing, *can do* nothing—and see daily cause for abhorring themselves and repenting in dust and ashes!

Our view of **death** will not always be alike—but in proportion to the degree in which the Holy Spirit is pleased to communicate his sensible influence. We may anticipate the moment of dissolution with pleasure and desire in the morning—and be ready to shrink

from the thought of it before night! But though our *frames* and *perceptions* vary, the report of *faith* concerning it is the same. The Lord usually reserves dying *strength* for a dying *hour*! When Israel was to pass Jordan, the Ark was in the river; and though the rear of the army could not see it, yet as they successively came forward and approached the banks, they all beheld the Ark, and all went safely over. As you are not weary of living, if it be the Lord's pleasure, so I hope, for the sake of your friends and the people whom you love—he will spare you among us a little longer; but when the time shall arrive which he has appointed for your dismissal—I make no doubt but he will overpower all your fears, silence all your enemies, and give you a comfortable, triumphant entrance into his kingdom.

You have nothing to fear from death; for Jesus, by dying, has disarmed it of its sting, has perfumed the grave, and opened the gates of glory for his believing people! Satan, so far as he is permitted, will assault our peace—but he is a *vanquished* enemy. Our Lord holds him with a chain, and sets him bounds which he cannot pass. He provides for us likewise the whole armor of God, and has promised to cover our heads himself in the day of battle, to bring us honorably through every skirmish, and to make us more than conquerors at last.

If you think my short unexpected interview with *Mr. C.* may justify my wishing he should know that I respect his character, love his person, and rejoice in what the Lord has done and is doing for him and by him, I beg you to tell him so—but I leave it entirely to you.

Four Letters to a Christian Friend

Letter 1

May, 1774.

My dear Madam,

We are glad to hear that you had a safe though perilous journey. I hope I shall be always mindful to pray, that the Lord may guide, bless, and comfort you, and give you such a manifestation of his person, power, and grace, as may set you at liberty from all fear, and fill you with abiding peace and joy in believing. Remember that Jesus has all power, the fullness of compassion, and embraces with open arms all that come to him for life and salvation.

Through mercy, Mrs. **** is better again; and I remain so, though death and illness are still walking about the town. O for grace to take warning by the sufferings of others—to set loose to the world, and so number our days as to incline our hearts to the one thing needful. Indeed that one thing includes many things, sufficient to engage the best of our thoughts and the most of our time—if we were duly sensible of their importance. But I may adopt the Psalmist's expression, "My soul cleaves to the dust!" How is it that the truths of which I have the most undoubted conviction, and which are, of all others, the most weighty—should make so little impression upon me? O I know the cause! It is deeply rooted. An evil nature cleaves to me; so that when I would do good—evil is present with me.

It is, however, a mercy to be made sensible of it, and in any measure humbled for it. Before long, this evil nature will be dropped into the grave—then all hindrances shall cease. This thought gives relief—I shall not always live this poor dying life. When I shall see the Redeemer as he is—I shall be like him. This will be a heaven indeed, to behold his glory without a veil, to rejoice in his love without a

cloud, and to sing his praises without one jarring or wandering note, forever!

In the mean time, may He enable us to serve him with our best. O that every power, faculty, and talent, were devoted to him! He deserves all we have, and ten thousand times more if we had it; for he has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. He gave himself for us. In one sense we are well suited to answer his purpose; for if we were not vile and worthless beyond expression, the exceeding riches of his grace would not have been so gloriously displayed. His glory shines more in redeeming one sinner—than in preserving a thousand angels!

Poor Mr.**** is still in the dark valley—but we trust prayer shall yet bring him out. Mighty things have been done in answer to prayer; and the Lord's arm is not shortened, neither is his ear heavy. It is our part to wait until we have an answer. One of his own hymns says,
The promise may be long deferred,
But never comes too late.

The sudden death of our friend is a heavy blow. He was an amiable, judicious, candid man, and an excellent preacher in a great sphere of usefulness; and his age and constitution gave hopes that he might have been eminently serviceable for many years. How often does the Lord write *vanity* upon all our expectations from men! He visited a person ill of a putrid fever, and carried the seeds of infection with him to London, where he died. His wife is a very excellent and accomplished woman—but exceedingly delicate in her frame and spirits. How can she bear so sudden and severe a stroke! But yet I hope she will afford a proof of the Lord's all-sufficiency and faithfulness.

O madam, the Lord our God is a great God! If he frowns, the smiles of the whole creation can afford no comfort; and if he is pleased to smile, he can enable the soul under the darkest dispensations to say, "All is well." Yet the flesh will feel, and it ought. Otherwise the exercise of faith, patience, and resignation, would be impracticable. I have lost in him one of my most valued and valuable friends—but what is my loss to that of his people!

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord increase you more and more, you and your children. May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you his peace. I thank him for leading you to us—but especially for making your visit here in any measure agreeable and profitable to yourself. If I have been an instrument in his hand for your comfort, I have reason to remember it among the greatest favors he has conferred upon me. And now, dear madam, once more farewell. If the Lord spares our lives, I hope we shall see each other again upon earth. But above all, let us rejoice in the blessed Gospel, by which immortality is brought to light, and a glorious prospect opened beyond the grave!

There sits our Savior enthroned in light,
Clothed with a body like our own.

There at least, after all the changes and trials of this earthly state, we shall meet to part no more.

Letter 2

1775.

My dear Madam,

If the Lord favors Miss M**** with a taste for the library of my proposing, she will be like the merchant-man seeking goodly pearls—

and will count all other books but *pebbles* in comparison of those four volumes, which present us with something new and important whenever we look into them. I shall be much obliged to her if she will commit the third chapter of Proverbs to her memory, and I shall pray the Lord to write it in her heart.

You surprise me when you tell me, that my birthday was noticed by those I never saw. Be so good as to return my thanks to my unknown friends, and tell them, that I pray that our common Lord and Savior will bless them abundantly. His people while here are scattered abroad, and separated by hills and rivers, and too often by denominations and prejudices—but by and by we shall all meet where we shall all know and acknowledge each other, and rejoice together for evermore! I have lately read with much pleasure, and I hope with some profit, the history of the Greenland Mission. Upon the whole, it is a glorious work. None who love the Lord will refuse to say—it is the finger of God indeed. For my own part, my soul rejoices in it; and I honor the instruments, as men who have hazarded their lives in an extraordinary manner for the sake of the Lord Jesus. I am sure that none could have sustained such discouragements at first, or have obtained such success afterwards, unless the Lord had *sent*, *supported*, and *owned* them.

I hope we shall have an interest in your prayers. I trust the Lord is yet with us. We have some ripe for the sickle, and some just springing up; some tokens of his gracious presence among us—but sin and Satan cut us out abundance of work as individuals, though through mercy as a church, we walk in peace.

The "toad and spider" are an exhibition of my daily experience. I am often wounded—but the Lord is my health. Still I am a living monument of God's mercy; and I trust that word, "Because I live you

shall live also," will carry me to the end. I am poor, weak, and foolish—but Jesus is wise, strong, and abounding in grace. He has given me a desire to trust my all in his hands, and He will not disappoint the expectation which he himself has raised. At present I have but little to say, and but little time to say it in. When you think of this place, I hope you will think and believe, that you have friends here most cordially interested in your welfare, and often remembering you in prayer. May the Lord be your guide and shield, and give you the best desires of your heart. I pray him to establish and settle you in the great truths of his Word. I trust he will. *We learn more, and more effectually, by one minute's communication with God through the medium of His Word—than we could from an assembly of theologians, or a library of books!*

Letter 3

August, 1775.

My dear Madam,

It is not owing to forgetfulness that your letter has been thus long unanswered. It has lain within my view this two weeks, demanding my first leisure hour—but affairs of daily occurrence have been so many and so pressing, that I have been constrained to put it off until now. I trust the Lord, by his Spirit and providence, will direct and prosper the settlement of your children. Give my love to your daughter, Miss M****. My idea of her enlarges. Methinks I see her aspiring to be as tall as her mamma. I hope likewise, that she increases in grace and wisdom, as in years and stature; and that hearing our Lord's flock is a *little* flock, she feels a thirst to be one of the happy number which constitutes his fold. If she has such a desire, I can tell who gave it her, for I am persuaded it was not born with her; and where the good farmer sows, there will he also reap.

Therefore, dear Miss M****, press forward—knock, and it shall be opened unto you, for yet there is room. O what a fold! O what a pasture! O what a Shepherd! Let us love, and sing, and wonder!

I hope the godly people are praying for our sinful, troubled land, in this dark day. The Lord is angry, the *sword* is drawn, and I am afraid nothing but the spirit of *wrestling prayer* can prevail for the returning it into the scabbard. Could things have proceeded to these extremities, except the Lord had withdrawn his beneficial blessing? It is a time of prayer. We see the beginning of trouble—but who can foresee the possible consequences? The fire is kindled—but how far it may spread, those who are above may perhaps know better than we.

I do not meddle with the *disputes* of party, nor concern myself with any *political* quarrels—but such as are laid down in Scripture. There I read that righteousness exalts a nation, and that sin is the reproach, and, if persisted in, the ruin of any people. Some people are startled at the enormous sum of our national debt. Those who understand spiritual arithmetic may be well startled if they sit down and compute the debt of *national sin*. Item, The profligacy of manners. Item, Perjury. Item, The cry of blood, the blood of thousands, perhaps millions, from the East Indies. It would take sheets, yes quires of paper, to draw out the particulars under each of these heads—and even then, much would remain untold. What can we answer, when the Lord says, "Shall not I visit you for these things? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Since we received the news of the first hostilities in America, we have had an additional prayer-meeting. Could I hear that professors in general, instead of wasting their breath in censuring men and political measures, were plying the Throne of Grace, I would still hope for a respite. Poor New England! once the glory of the earth,

now likely to be visited with fire and sword. They have left their first love, and the Lord is sorely contending with them. Yet surely their sins as a people are not to be compared with ours. I am just so much affected with these things as to know, that I am not affected enough. Oh! my spirit is sadly cold and insensible, or I would lay them to heart in a different manner. Yet I endeavor to give the alarm as far as I can. There is one political maxim which comforts me. "*The Lord reigns!*" His hand guides the *storm*; and he knows those who are his—how to protect, support, and deliver them. He will take care of his own cause; yes, he will extend his kingdom, even by these formidable methods. Men have one thing in view; He has another—and his counsel shall stand!

The chief piece of news since my last is concerning *B.A.* She has finished her course, and is now with the great multitude who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the Word of his testimony. Tuesday the 1st of February she was in our assembly, was taken ill the next day, and died while we were assembling the Tuesday following. She had an easy death, retained her senses and her speech until the last minute, and went without a struggle or a sigh. She was not in raptures during her illness—but was composed, and maintained a strong and lively faith. She had a numerous gathering about her bed daily, who were all witnesses to the power of faith, and to the faithfulness of the Lord, enabling her to triumph over the approaches of death; for she was well known and well respected. She will be much missed—but I hope He will answer the many prayers she put up for us, and raise up others in her place. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." Blessed are they who know whom they have believed, and when death comes can cheerfully rest their hopes on him who died that we might live. She had been long a precious and honorable woman—but her hope in the trying hour rested not in what *she* had done for the Lord—but upon

what *he* had done for her; not upon the *change* his grace has wrought in her—but upon the righteousness he had wrought out for her by *his obedience* unto death. This supported her; for she saw nothing in herself but what she was ashamed of. She saw reason to renounce her own *goodness*, as well as her own *sins*—as to the point of acceptance with God, and died, as Paul lived, *determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified*.

Our friends, Mr. and Mrs. C**** are moving to Scotland soon. All beneath the moon (like the moon itself) is subject to incessant change. *Alterations* and *separations* are graciously appointed of the Lord, to remind us that this world is not our rest, and to prepare our thoughts for that approaching last change, which shall *fix* us forever in an unchangeable state! O Madam! What shall we poor worms render to him who has brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel, taken away the sting of death, revealed a glorious prospect beyond the grave, and given us eyes to see it? The reflection, that we must, before long, take a final farewell of all that is most capable of pleasing us upon earth, is not only tolerable—but pleasant. For we know we cannot fully possess our best friend, our chief treasure, until we have done with all below. Nay, we cannot until then, properly see each other. We are cased up in vehicles of clay, and converse together as if we were in different coaches with the blinds close drawn round. We see the carriage, and the voice tells us that we have a friend within it. But we shall know each other better, when death shall open the coach-doors, and bring out the company, and lead them into the glorious apartments which the Lord has appointed to be the common residence of those who love him. What an assembly will that be! What a constellation of glory, when each individual shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father! No sins, sorrows, temptations; no veils, clouds, or prejudices, shall interrupt us then! All names of vain distinction (the fruits of present

remaining darkness, the channels of bigotry, and the stumbling-block of the world), will be at an end.

The description you give of your present residence pleases me much, and chiefly because it describes and manifests to me something still more interesting, I mean the peaceable situation of your *mind*. Had he placed you in an Eden some months ago, it would hardly have awakened your descriptive talent. But he whom the winds and seas obey has calmed your mind, and I trust will go on to fill you with all joy and peace in believing. *It is no great matter where we are, provided we know that the Lord has placed us there, and that he is with us!*

Letter 4

1776.

My dear Madam,

We take it for granted that you will now most certainly make us a visit. Do come as soon, and stay as long, as you possibly can. Methinks you will be glad to get out of the smell and noise of London, as soon as possible. If we did not go to London now and then, we would perhaps forget how people live there. Especially I pity professors—they are exposed to as many dangers as people who live in the coal mines; chilling damps, scorching blasts, epidemic disorders, owing to the impure air. Such are the winds of *false doctrines*, the explosions of *controversy*, the blights of *worldly conversation*, the contagion of *evil custom*. In short, a person had need have a good constitution of grace, and likewise to be well supplied with antidotes, to preserve a tolerable share of spiritual health in such an ungodly situation.

And now, how shall I fill up the rest of the paper? It is a shame for a Christian and a minister to say he has no subject at hand, when the *inexhaustible theme of redeeming love* is ever pressing upon our attention. I will tell you then, though you know it—that *the Lord reigns!* He who once bore our sins, and carried our sorrows—is seated upon a throne of glory, and exercises all power in heaven and on earth. Thrones, principalities, and powers, bow before him. Every event in the kingdoms of *providence* and of *grace*—are under his rule. His providence pervades and manages the whole universe, and is as minutely attentive to every part—as if there were only a single object in his view. From the tallest archangel to the smallest ant or fly—all depend on him for their being, their preservation, and their powers. He directs the sparrows where to build their nests, and where to find their food. He over-rules the rise and fall of nations; and bends, with an invincible energy and unerring wisdom—all events to his sovereign will! So that while many intend other outcomes—their designs all concur and coincide in the accomplishment of his holy will.

He restrains with a mighty hand—the still more formidable efforts of the powers of darkness. Satan with all his hosts cannot exert their malice a hair's-breadth beyond the limits of his permission. This omnipotent Savior is the head and husband of His believing people. How happy are those whom it is his good pleasure to bless! How safe are they whom he has engaged to protect! How honored and privileged are they to whom he is pleased to manifest himself, and whom he enables and warrants to claim him as their friend and eternal portion! Having redeemed them by his own blood—he esteems them as his treasure, his jewels, and protects them as the pupil of his eye. They shall not lack any good thing. They need not fear. His unerring *eye* is upon them in every situation; His *ear* is always open to their prayers; and His everlasting *arms* are under

them for their sure support! On earth he guides their steps, controls their enemies, and directs all his dispensations for their spiritual good. While in heaven he is pleading their cause, preparing a glorious home for them, and communicating down to them reviving foretastes of the glory which they shall shortly enter into. "The Lord reigns! Let the earth rejoice!" Psalm 97:1 "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns!" Revelation 19:6.

O how is this mystery hidden from an unbelieving world! Who can believe it, until it is made known by personal experience, what an fellowship is maintained in this land of shadows between the Lord of glory—and sinful worms! How should we praise him that he has visited us! For we were once blind to his beauty, and insensible to his love, and would have remained so to the last, had he not revealed his goodness and grace to us, and been found by us when we sought him not.

Mrs. **** presents her love. The bite of the leech, which I mentioned to you, has confined her to the house ever since—but I hope she will be able to go out tomorrow. We were for a while apprehensive of worse consequences—but the Lord is gracious. He shows us in a variety of instances what *dependent creatures* we are, how blind to events, and how easily the methods which we take to relieve ourselves from a small inconvenience may plunge us into a greater trouble. Thus we learn (happy indeed if we can effectually learn it) that there is no safety—but in his protection, and that nothing can do us good—but by his blessing. As for myself, I see so many reasons why he might contend with me, that I am amazed that he affords me and mine so much peace, and appoints us so few trials. We live as upon a field of battle. Many are hourly suffering and falling around us; and I can give no reason why we are preserved—but that he is

God, and not man. What a mercy that we are only truly known to him, who is alone able to hear us!

May the Lord bless you, comfort you, guide you, and guard you!

Seven Letters to a Christian Friend

Letter 1

March 18, 1767.

Dear friend,

I can truly say, that I bear you upon my heart and in my prayers. I have rejoiced to see the beginning of a good and gracious work in you; and I have confidence in the Lord Jesus, that he will carry it on and complete it; and that you will be among the number of those who shall sing of "redeeming love" to all eternity. Therefore fear none of the things appointed for you to suffer by the way—but gird up the loins of your mind, and hope to the end. Be not impatient—but wait humbly upon the Lord.

You have one hard lesson to learn, that is—the evil of your own heart. You know something of it—but it is needful that you should know more; for the more we know of ourselves, the more we shall prize and love Jesus and his salvation. I hope what you find in yourself by daily experience will humble you—but not discourage you. Humble you it should, and I believe it does. Are not you amazed sometimes that you should have so much as a hope, that, poor and needy as you are, the Lord thinks of you? But let not all you feel discourage you; for if our Physician is almighty, our disease cannot be desperate; and

if he casts none out who come to him, why should you fear? Our sins are many—but his mercies are more. Our sins are great—but His righteousness is greater. We are weak—but he is power.

Most of our complaints are owing to unbelief, and the remainder of a legal spirit; and these evils are not removed in a day. Wait on the Lord, and he will enable you to see more and more of the power and grace of our High Priest. The more you know him—the better you will trust him. The more you trust him—the better you will love him. The more you love him—the better you will serve him. This is God's way. You are not called to *buy*—but to *beg*; not to be strong in yourself—but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. He is teaching you these things, and I trust he will teach you to the end.

Remember, the growth of a believer is not like a mushroom—but like an oak, which increases slowly indeed—but surely. Many suns, showers, and frosts, pass upon it before it comes to perfection; and in winter, when it seems to be dead—it is gathering strength at the root. Be humble, watchful, and diligent in the means, and endeavor to look through all, and fix your eye upon Jesus—and all shall be well. I commend you to the care of the good Shepherd, and remain, for his sake.

Letter 2

May 31, 1769.

Dear friend,

I was sorry I did not write as you expected. Indeed I have not forgotten you; you are often in my thoughts, and seldom omitted in my prayers. I hope the Lord will make what you see and hear while abroad profitable to you, to increase your knowledge, to strengthen your faith, and to make you from henceforth, well satisfied with your

situation. If I am not mistaken, you will be sensible, that though there are some desirable things to be met with in London preferable to any other place—yet, upon the whole, a quiet situation in the country, under one stated ministry, and in connection with one people—has the advantage. It is pleasant now and then to have opportunity of hearing a variety of preachers—but the best and greatest of them are no more than instruments in God's hands. Some preachers can please the *ear* better than others—but none can reach the *heart* any farther than the Lord is pleased to open it. This he showed you upon your first going up; and I doubt not but your disappointment did you more good than if you had heard with all the pleasure you expected.

The Lord was pleased to visit me with a slight illness in my recent journey. I was far from well on the Tuesday—but supposed it owing to the fatigue of riding, and the heat of the weather—but the next day I was taken with a shivering, to which a fever followed. I was then near sixty miles from home. The Lord gave me much peace in my soul, and I was enabled to hope he would bring me safely home, in which I was not disappointed. And though I had the fever most of the way, my journey was not unpleasant. He likewise strengthened me to preach twice on Sunday; and at night I found myself well, only very weary, and I have continued well ever since.

I have reason to speak much of his goodness, and to kiss the rod, for it was sweetened with abundant mercies. I thought that had it been his pleasure I would have continued sick at Oxford, or even have died there, I had no objection. Though I had not that joy and sensible comfort which some are favored with—yet I was quite free from pain, fear, and care, and felt myself sweetly composed to his will—whatever it might be. Thus he fulfils his promise in making our

strength equal to our day; and every new trial gives us a new proof how happy it is to be enabled to put our trust in Him.

I hope, in the midst of all your engagements, you find a little time to read his good Word, and to wait at his mercy-seat. It is good for us to draw near to Him. It is an honor that He permits us to pray; and we shall surely find he is a prayer-hearing God.

Endeavor to be diligent in the means—yet watch and strive against a legal spirit, which is always aiming to represent him as a hard master—watching, as it were, to take advantage of us. But it is far otherwise. His name is Love. He looks upon us with compassion; He knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust; and when our sins prevail, He does not bid us to despond—but reminds us that we have an Advocate with the Father, who is able to pity, to pardon, and to save to the uttermost. Think of the names and relations he bears. Does he not call himself a Savior, a Shepherd, a Friend, and a Husband? Has he not made known unto us his love, his blood, his righteousness, his promises, his power, and his grace—and all for our encouragement? Away then with all doubting, unbelieving thoughts; they will not only distress your heart—but weaken your hands.

Take it for granted upon the warrant of his Word, that you are his, and he is yours; that he has loved you with an everlasting love, and therefore in loving-kindness has drawn you to himself; that he will surely accomplish that which he has begun, and that nothing which can be named or thought of shall ever be able to separate you from him. This persuasion will give you strength for the battle! This is the shield which will quench the fiery darts of Satan! This is the helmet which the enemy cannot pierce! Whereas if we go forth doubting and fearing, and are afraid to trust any farther than we can feel, we are

weak as water, and easily overcome. Be strong, therefore, not in yourself—but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Pray for me.

Letter 3

March 14.

Dear friend

I think you would hardly expect me to write—if you knew how I am forced to live at London. However, I would have you believe I am as willing to write to you, as you are to receive my letters.

I have been visiting Mrs. ****. She is a woman of a sorrowful spirit—she talks and weeps. I believe she would think herself happy to be situated as you are, notwithstanding the many advantages she has at London. I see daily, and I hope you have likewise learned, that places, and outward circumstances cannot, of themselves, either hinder or help us in walking with God. So far as he is pleased to be with us, and to teach us by his Spirit, wherever we are—we shall be happy and content. And if he does not bless us and water us every moment, the more we have of our own wishes and wills—the more unhappy we will be.

One thing is needful—a humble, dependent spirit, to renounce our own wills, and give up ourselves to his disposal without reserve. This is the path of peace—and it is the path of safety. For he has said, "He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way." I hope you will fight and pray against every rising of a murmuring spirit, and be thankful for the great things which he has already done for you. It is good to be humbled for sin—but not to be discouraged; for though we are poor creatures, Jesus is a complete Savior; and we bring more honor to God by believing in his name, and trusting his Word of promise, than we could do by a thousand outward works.

I pray the Lord to shine upon your soul, and to fill you with all joy and peace in believing. Remember to pray for us, that we may be brought home to you in peace.

Letter 4

London, Aug. 19, 1775.

Dear friend,

You see I am mindful of my promise; and glad would I be to write something that the Lord may be pleased to make a word in season. I went yesterday into the pulpit very dry and heartless. I seemed to have fixed upon a text—but when I came to the pinch, it was so shut up that I could not preach from it. I had hardly a minute to choose, and therefore was forced to snatch at that which came first upon my mind, which proved "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." 2 Timothy 1:12. Thus I set off at a venture, having no resource but in the Lord's mercy and faithfulness; and indeed what other can we wish for? Presently my subject opened, and I know not when I have been favored with more liberty.

Why do I tell you this? Only as an instance of his goodness, to encourage you to put your strength in him, and not to be afraid, even when you feel your own weakness and insufficiency most sensibly. We are never more safe, and never have more reason to expect the Lord's help—than when we are most sensible that we can do nothing without him. This was the lesson Paul learned—to rejoice in his own poverty and emptiness, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Could Paul have done anything, Jesus would not have had the honor of doing all. This way of being saved entirely by grace, from first to last, is contrary to our natural pride. It mortifies self, leaving it

nothing to boast of; and, through the remains of an unbelieving, legal spirit, it often seems discouraging. When we think ourselves so utterly helpless and worthless, we are too ready to fear that the Lord will therefore reject us; whereas, in truth, such a poverty of spirit is the best mark we can have of a saving interest in his promises and care.

How often have I longed to be an instrument of establishing you in the peace and hope of the Gospel! and I have but one way of attempting it, by telling you over and over of the power and grace of Jesus. You need nothing to make you happy—but to have the eyes of your understanding more fixed upon the Redeemer, and more enlightened by the Holy Spirit to behold his glory. Oh, he is a suitable Savior! He has power, authority, and compassion to save to the uttermost! He has given his Word of promise, to engage our confidence; and he is able and faithful to make good the expectations and desires he has raised in us. Put your trust in him; believe (as we say) *through thick and thin*, in defiance of all objections from within and without. For this, Abraham is recommended as a pattern to us. He overlooked all difficulties. He ventured and hoped even against hope, in a case which, to appearance, was desperate; because he knew that He who had *promised*—was also able to *perform*.

Your sister is much upon my mind. Her illness grieves me. Were it in my power I would quickly remove it. The Lord can, and indeed will remove it—when it has answered the end for which he sent it. I trust he has brought her to us for good, and that she is chastised by him—that she may not be condemned with the world. I hope, though she says little, she lifts up her heart to him for a blessing. I wish you may be enabled to leave her, and yourself, and all your concerns, in his hands. *He has a sovereign right to do with us as he pleases*; and if we consider what we are, surely we shall confess we have no reason

to complain. To those who seek him, his sovereignty is exercised in a way of grace. All shall work together for good. Everything which he sends is needful; nothing can be needful which he withholds. Be content to bear the cross; others have borne it before you. You have need of patience; and if you ask, the Lord will give it to you—but there can be no settled peace until our will is in a measure subdued. Hide yourself under the shadow of his wings; rely upon his care and power; look upon him as a physician who has graciously undertaken to heal your soul of the worst of sicknesses, sin! Yield to his prescriptions, and fight against every thought that would represent it as desirable to be permitted to choose for yourself. When you cannot see your way—be satisfied that he is your leader. When your spirit is overwhelmed within you—he knows your path. He will not leave you to sink. He has appointed seasons of refreshment, and you shall find that he does not forget you. Above all, keep close to the Throne of Grace. If we seem to get no good by attempting to draw near him—we may be sure we shall get none by keeping away from him!

Letter 5

Dear friend,

I promised you another letter, and now for the performance. If I had said, It *may* be, or, *perhaps* I will, you would be in suspense—but if I promise, then you expect that I will not disappoint you, unless something should render it impossible for me to make my word good. I thank you for your good opinion of me, and for thinking I mean what I say; and I pray that you may be enabled more and more to honor the Lord, by believing his promise. For he is not like a man, that would fail or change, or be prevented by anything unforeseen from doing what he has said. And yet we find it easier to trust to *worms* than to trust the *God* of truth! Is it not so with you? And I can

assure you it is often so with me. But here is the mercy, that his ways are as high above ours—as the heavens are higher than the earth. Though we are foolish and unbelieving, he remains faithful. He will not deny himself.

I recommend to you especially that promise of God, which is so comprehensive that it takes in all our concerns, I mean, that "all things shall work together for good." How hard is it to believe, that not only those things which are *grievous* to the flesh—but even those things which draw forth our *corruptions*, and reveal to us what is in our hearts, and fill us with guilt and shame—should in the outcome, work for our good! Yet the Lord has said it. All your pains and trials, all that befalls you in your own person, or that affects you upon the account of others—shall in the end prove to your advantage. And your peace does not depend upon any change of circumstances which may appear desirable—but in having your will bowed to the Lord's will, and made willing to submit all to his disposal and management. Pray for this, and wait patiently for him, and he will do it.

Do not be surprised to find yourself poor, helpless, and vile. All whom God favors and teaches—will find themselves so. The more grace increases—the more we shall see to abase us in our own eyes! This will make the Savior and his salvation more precious to us. He takes his own wise methods to humble you, and to prove you; and I am sure he will do you good in the end.

Letter 6

September 16, 1775.

Dear friend,

When you receive this, I hope it will give you pleasure to think, that, if the Lord is pleased to favor us with health, we shall all meet again

in a few days. I have met with much kindness at London, and many comforts and mercies. However, I shall be glad to return home. There my *heart* lives, let my *body* be where it will. I long to see all my dear people, and I shall be glad to see you. I steal a little time to write another line or two, more to satisfy you than for anything particular I have to say.

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world!" John 16:33. I doubt not but the Lord is bringing you forward, and that you have a good right to say to your soul, "Why are you cast down and disquieted? Hope in God—for I shall yet praise him!" An evil heart, an evil temper, and the many crosses we meet with in passing through an evil world—will bring us many troubles. But the Lord has provided a balm for every wound, and a cordial for every care. The fruit of all trials—is to purge away sin, and the end of all will be eternal life in glory. Think of eternal glory—put it in the balance of the sanctuary; and then throw all your trials into the opposite scale, and you will find there is no proportion between them! Say then, "Though he slays me—yet I will trust in him;" for, when he has fully tried me, I shall come forth like gold.

You would have liked to have been with me last Wednesday. I preached at Westminster Bridewell. It is a prison and house of correction. The bulk of my congregation were robbers, highwaymen, pick-pockets, and poor unhappy women, such as infest the streets of this city, sunk in sin, and lost to shame. I had a hundred or more of these before me. I preached from 1Ti. 1:15; and began With telling them my own testimony. This gained their attention more than I expected. I spoke to them nearly an hour and a half. I shed many tears myself, and saw some of them shed tears likewise. Ah! had you seen their present condition, and could you hear the history of some of them, it would make you sing, "*O to grace how great a debtor!*"

By nature they were no worse than the most moral people; and there was doubtless a time when many of them little thought what they should live to do and suffer. I might have been, like them, in chains—and one of them have come to preach to me, had the Lord so pleased.

Letter 7

Oct. 10, 1777.

Dear friend,

I have just come from seeing N**** in the hospital. The people told me she is much better than she was—but she is far from being well. She was brought to me into a parlor, which saved me the painful task of going to inquire and seek for her among the patients. My spirits always sink when I am within those mournful walls, and I think no money could prevail on me to spend an hour there every day. Yet surely no sight upon earth is more suited to teach one *thankfulness* and *resignation*. Surely I have reason, in my worst times, to be thankful that I am out of hell, out of Bedlam, out of Newgate! If my eyes were as bad as yours, and my back worse, still I hope I should set a great value upon this mercy, that my senses are preserved. I hope you will think so too. The Lord afflicts us at times—but it is always a thousand times less than we deserve, and much less than many of our fellow-creatures are suffering around us. Let us therefore pray for grace to be humble, thankful, and patient.

This day last year, I was under the surgeon's knife. There is another cause for thankfulness, that the Lord inclined me to submit to the operation, and brought me happily through it. In short, I have so many reasons for thankfulness, that I cannot count them. I may truly say they are more in number than the hairs of my head! And yet, alas! how cold, insensible, and ungrateful I am! I find no good by

complaining, except to him who is able to help me. It is better for you and me to be admiring the compassion and fullness of grace that is in our Savior—than to dwell and pore too much upon our own poverty and vileness. He is able to help and save to the uttermost. There I desire to cast anchor, and wish you to do so likewise. Hope in God—for you shall yet praise him!

Five Letters to a Young Man Going into the Christian Ministry

Letter 1

March 7, 1765.

Dear Sir,

Your letter of February 19th came to me yesterday. I have read it with attention, and very willingly sit down to offer you my thoughts. Your case reminds me of my own—my first desires towards the *ministry* were attended with great uncertainties and difficulties, and the perplexity of my own mind was heightened by the various and opposite judgments of my friends. The advice I have to offer is the result of painful experience and exercise, and for this reason perhaps may not be unacceptable to you. I pray our gracious Lord to make it useful.

I was long distressed, as you are, about what was or was not a **proper call to the ministry**. It now seems to me an easy point to solve—but perhaps will not be so to you until the Lord shall make it clear to yourself in your own case. I have not room to say so much as I could. in brief, I think it principally includes three things:

1. A warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service. I apprehend, the man who is once moved by the Spirit of God to this work, will prefer it, if attainable, to thousands of gold and silver; so that, though he is at times intimidated by a sense of its *importance* and *difficulty*, compared with *his own great insufficiency* (for it is to be presumed a call of this sort, if indeed from God, will be accompanied with *humility* and *self-abasement*), yet he cannot give it up. I hold it a good rule to inquire in this point—whether the desire to preach is most fervent in our most lively and spiritual frames, and when we are most laid in the dust before the Lord? If so, it is a good sign. But if, as is sometimes the case, a person is very earnest to be a preacher to others, when he finds but little hungering and thirstiness after grace in his own soul—it is then to be feared his zeal springs rather from a *selfish* principle—than from the Spirit of God.

2. Besides this affectionate desire and readiness to preach, there must in due season appear some competent sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance. Surely, if the Lord sends a man to teach others—he will furnish him with the *means*. I believe many have *intended* well in becoming preachers, who yet went beyond or before their call in so doing. The main difference between a *minister* and a *private Christian* seems to consist in these *ministerial gifts*, which are imparted to him, not for his own sake—but for the edification of others. But then I say, these are to appear in due season. They are not to be expected instantaneously—but gradually, in the use of proper means. They are necessary for the discharge of the ministry; but not necessary as pre-requisites to warrant our desires after it. In your case, you are young, and have time before you. Therefore, I think you need not as yet perplex yourself with inquiring if you have these gifts already. It is sufficient

if your *desire* is fixed, and you are willing, in the way of prayer and diligence, to wait upon the Lord for them—as yet you need them not.

3. That which finally evidences a proper call—is a correspondent opening in Providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place—of actually entering upon the work of the ministry. And until this concurrence arrives, you must not expect to be always clear from hesitation in your own mind. The principal caution on this head is, not to be too hasty in catching at first appearances. If it be the Lord's will to bring you into his ministry—he has already appointed your place and service; and though you know it not at present—you shall at a proper time. If you had the talents of an angel—you could do no good with them until *his* hour has come—and until he leads you to the people whom he has determined to bless by your means.

It is very difficult to restrain ourselves within the bounds of prudence here, when our zeal is warm, a sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts, and a tender compassion for perishing sinners is ready to prompt us to break out too soon—but "he who believes shall not make haste". I was about five years under this constraint. Sometimes I thought I must preach, though it was in the streets. I listened to everything that seemed plausible, and to many things that were not so. But the Lord graciously, and as it were insensibly, hedged up my way with thorns; otherwise, if I had been left to my own spirit, I would have put it quite out of my power to have been brought into such a sphere of usefulness, as he in his good time has been pleased to lead me to. And I can now see clearly, that at the time I would first have gone out, though my intention was, I hope, good in the main—yet I overrated myself, and had not that spiritual judgment and experience which are requisite for so great a service.

I wish you therefore to take time; and if you have a desire to enter into the *Established Church*, endeavor to keep your zeal within moderate bounds, and avoid everything that might unnecessarily clog your admission with difficulties. I would not have you hide your profession, or to be backward to speak for God; but avoid what looks like preaching, and be content with being a *learner* in the school of Christ for some years. The *delay* will not be *lost* time; you will be so much the more acquainted with the *Gospel*, with your own *heart*, and with *human nature*. The last is a necessary branch of a minister's knowledge, and can only be acquired by comparing what passes within us, and around us—with what we read in the Word of God.

I am glad to find you have a distaste both for *Arminian* and *Antinomian* doctrines—but let not the mistakes of others sit too heavy upon you. Be thankful for the grace which has made you to differ; be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear; but *beware of engaging in **theological disputes***, without evident necessity, and some probable hope of usefulness. They tend to eat out the life and savor of religion, and to make the soul lean and dry. Where God has begun a real work of grace, *incidental mistakes* will be lessened by time and experience; where he has not, it is of little signification what sentiments people hold, or whether they call themselves Arminians or Calvinists.

I agree with you, that there is time enough for you to think of Oxford yet; and that if your purpose is fixed, and all circumstances render it prudent and proper to devote yourself to the ministry, you will do well to spend a year or two in private studies. It would be further helpful, in this view, to place yourself where there is Gospel preaching, and a spiritual people. If your favorable opinion of our church should induce you to come here, I shall be very ready to give

you every assistance in my power. As I have trod exactly the path you seem to be setting out in, I might so far perhaps be more serviceable than those who are in other respects much better qualified to assist you. I doubt not but in this, and every other step, you will entreat the Lord's direction; and I hope you will not forget to pray for me.

Letter 2

June 7, 1767.

Dear Sir,

I must beg you (once for all) to release me from any constraint about the length or frequency of my letters. Believe that I think of you, and pray for you—even when you do not hear from me. Your correspondence is not quite so extensive as mine, therefore you may write the oftener. Your letters will be always welcome; and I will write to you when I find a leisure hour, and have anything upon my mind to offer.

You seem sensible where your most observable failing lies, and to take reproof and admonition concerning it in good part; I therefore hope and believe the Lord will give you a growing victory over it. You must not expect that bad *habits* and *tempers* will be eradicated instantaneously; but by perseverance in prayer, and observation upon the experiences of every day, much may be done in time. Now and then you will (as is usual in the course of war) lose a battle; but be not discouraged—but rally your forces—and return to the fight! There is a comfortable word, a leaf of the tree of life, for healing the wounds we receive, "I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if you do sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." 1 Jo. 2:1.

If the *enemy* surprises you, and your *heart* smites you—do not stand astonished as if there was no help, nor give way to sorrow as if there was no hope, nor attempt to heal yourself; but go immediately to the Throne of Grace, to the great Physician, to the compassionate High Priest—and tell him all. Satan knows, that if he can keep us from confession, our wounds will rankle. Do profit by David's experience, "When I refused to confess my sin, I was weak and miserable, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone!" Psalm 32:3-5. When we are simple and open-hearted in abasing ourselves before the Lord, though we have acted foolishly and ungratefully, he will seldom let us remain long without affording us a sense of his compassion and forgiveness. For he is gracious; he knows our frame, and how to bear with us, though we can hardly bear with ourselves, or with one another.

The main thing is to have the heart right with God. This will bring us in the end safely through many mistakes and blunders. But a double mind, a selfish spirit—which would *halve* things between God and the world—the Lord abhors. Though I have not yet had many opportunities of commending your prudence, I have always had a good opinion of your sincerity and integrity. If I am not mistaken in this, I make no doubt of your doing well. If the Lord is pleased to bless you, he will undoubtedly make you humble; for you cannot be either happy or safe, or have any probable hope of abiding usefulness, without a sincere humility. I do not know that I have had anything so much at heart in my connections with you, as to impress you with a sense of the *necessity and advantages of a humble frame*

of spirit. I hope it has not been in vain. O! to be little in our own eyes!

Humility is the foundation of every grace! Humility leads to a continual dependence upon the Lord Jesus. Humility is the spirit which he has promised to bless. Humility conciliates us good-will and acceptance among men—for he who abases himself is sure to be honored. And that this temper is so hard to *attain* and *preserve*—is a striking proof of our depravity. For are we not sinners? Were we not rebels and enemies before we knew the Gospel? And have we not been unfaithful, backsliding, and unprofitable ever since? Are we not redeemed by the blood of Jesus? We cannot stand a single moment—unless he upholds us. We have nothing which we have not received. We have not received anything which we have not abused. Why then is *dust and ashes* proud?

I am glad you have found some spiritual acquaintance in your barren land. I hope you will be helpful to them, and they to you. You do well to guard against every appearance of evil. If you are heartily for Jesus, Satan owes you a grudge. One way or other he will try to cut you out work, and the Lord may allow him to go to the length of his chain. But though you are to keep your eye upon him, and expect to be tempted by him at every step, you need not be slavishly afraid of him—for Jesus is stronger and wiser than he; and there is a complete suit of armor provided for all who are engaged on the Lord's side!

Letter 3

Oct. 20, 1767.

Dear Sir,

A concern for the perplexity you have met with, from objections which have been made against some expressions in my printed

sermons, and in general against *exhorting sinners to believe in Jesus*, engages me to write immediately. I shall chiefly confine myself at present, to the subject you propose.

In the first place, I beg you to be upon your guard against a *reasoning spirit*. Search the Scriptures; and where you can find a plain rule or warrant for any practice—go boldly on; and be not discouraged because you may not be clearly able to answer or reconcile every difficulty which may either occur to your own mind, or be put in your way by others. Our hearts are very dark and narrow; and the very root of all apostasy is a proud disposition to question the necessity or propriety of Divine appointments. But the child-like simplicity of faith, is to follow God without *reasoning*; taking it for granted a thing must be right if he directs it—and charging all seeming inconsistencies to the account of our own ignorance.

I suppose the people who trouble you upon this head are of two sorts. 1st, those who preach upon **Arminian** principles, and suppose a free-will in man, in a greater or less degree, to turn to God when the Gospel is proposed. These, if you speak to sinners at large, though they will approve of your doing so, will take occasion, perhaps, to charge you with acting in contradiction to your own principles. So it seems Mr. **** has said. I love and honor that man greatly, and I beg you will tell him so from me; and tell him farther, that the reason why he is not a Calvinist, is because he misapprehends our principles.

If I had a proper call, I would undertake to prove the direct contrary; namely, that to exhort and deal plainly with sinners, to stir them up to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold of eternal life, is an attempt not reconcilable to sober reason upon any other grounds

than those doctrines which we are called Calvinists for holding; and that all the absurdities which are charged upon us, as consequences of what we teach, are indeed truly chargeable upon those who differ from us in these points. I think this unanswerably proved by Jonathan Edwards, in his discourse on the *freedom of the will*; though the chain of reasoning is so close, that few will give attention and pains to pursue it. As to myself, if I was not a Calvinist—I would have no more hope of success in preaching to men, than to horses or cows!

But these objections are more frequently urged by **Calvinists** themselves; many of them, I doubt not, good men—but betrayed into a curiosity of spirit, which often makes their ministry (if ministers) dry and inefficacious, and their lives sour and unsavory. Such a spirit is too prevalent in many professors, that if a man reveals a warm zeal for the glory of God, and is enabled to bear a faithful testimony to the Gospel truths; yes, though the Lord evidently blesses him, they overlook all, and will undervalue a sermon, which upon the whole they cannot but acknowledge to be Scriptural, if they meet with a single sentence contrary to the opinion they have taken up! I am sorry to see such a spirit prevailing. But this I observe, that the ministers who give into this way, though good men and good preachers in other respects—are seldom very useful or very zealous. And likewise for those who are in private life, are more ready dispute dry theological points, at least harping upon a string of doctrines, than for experimental and heart-searching converse, whereby one may warm and edify another. Blessed be God, who has kept me and my people from this turn. If it should ever creep in or spread among us, I would write *Ichabod* upon our assembly!

I advise you, therefore, to keep close to the Bible and prayer. Bring your difficulties to the Lord, and entreat him to give you and

maintain in you a simple and sincere spirit. Search the Scriptures. How did Peter deal with Simon Magus? We have no right to think worse of any who can hear us, than the Apostle did of him. He seemed almost to think his case desperate, and yet he advised him to repentance and prayer. Examine the same Apostle's discourse, Acts 3, and the close of Paul's sermon, Acts thirteen. The power is all of God; the means are likewise of his appointment; and he always is pleased to work by such means as may show that the power is his. What was Moses's rod in itself, or the trumpets that threw down Jericho? What influence could the pool of Siloam have, that the eyes of the blind man, by washing in it, should be opened? or what could Ezekiel's feeble breath contribute to the making dry bones live? All these *means* were exceedingly disproportionate to the effect; but He who ordered them to be used, accompanied them with his power.

Yet if Moses had gone without his rod; if Joshua had slighted the rams' horns; if the prophet had thought it foolishness to speak to dry bones, or the blind man refused to wash his eyes—nothing would have been done. The same holds good in the present subject. I do not reason, expostulate, and persuade sinners, because I think that *I* can prevail with them—but because the Lord has commanded it. He directs me to address them as reasonable creatures; to take them by every handle; to speak to their consciences; to tell them of the terrors of the Lord, and of his tender mercies; to argue with them what good they find in sin; whether they need a Savior; to put them in mind of death, judgment, and eternity, etc. When I have done all, I know it is to little purpose—unless the Lord speaks to their hearts. And he will speak to his own, and at his own time. I am sure he will, because he has promised it. See Isaiah 55:10-11; Mat. 28:20.

Indeed I have heard expressions in the warmth of delivery which I could not wholly approve, and therefore do not imitate. But in

general, I see no preaching made very useful for the gathering of souls, where perishing sinners are shut out of the discourse. I think one of the closest and most moving addresses to sinners I ever met with, is in John Owen's Exposition of the 130th Psalm, from p. 243 to 276. If you get it and examine it, I think you will find it all agreeable to Scripture; and he was a steady, deep-sighted Calvinist. I wish you to study it well, and make it your pattern. He handles the same point likewise in other places, and shows the weakness of the exceptions taken somewhere at large—but I cannot just now find the passage. Many think themselves quite right, because they have not had their thoughts exercised at large—but have confined themselves to *one track*. There are *extremes* in everything. I pray God to show you the golden mean.

Letter 4

August 30, 1770.

Dear Sir,

I would steal a few minutes here to write, lest I should not have leisure at home. I have not your letter with me, and therefore can only answer so far as I retain a general remembrance of the contents.

You will, doubtless, find rather perplexity than advantage from the *multiplicity of advice* you may receive, if you endeavor to reconcile and adopt the very different sentiments of your friends. I think it will be best to make use of them in a full latitude, that is, to correct and qualify them one by another, and to borrow a little from each, without confining yourself entirely to any. You will probably be advised to different *extremes*. It will then be impossible to follow both; but it may be practical to find a *middle path* between them. I believe this will generally prove the best and safest method. Only

consult your own temper, and endeavor to incline rather to that side to which you are the least disposed, by the ordinary strain of your own inclination; for on that side you will be in the least danger of erring. Warm and hasty dispositions will seldom move too slow, and those who are naturally languid and cool are as little liable to overact their part.

With respect to the particulars you instance, I have generally thought you warm and enterprising enough, and therefore thought it best to restrain you; but I meant only to hold you in—until you had acquired some farther knowledge and observation both of yourself and of others. I have the pleasure to hope (especially of late) that you are become more self-distrusting and wary than you were some time ago. And, therefore, as your years and time are advancing, and you have been for a tolerable space under a probation of silence, I can make no objection to your attempting sometimes to speak in select societies; but let your attempts be confined to such—I mean where you are acquainted with the people, or the leading part of them, and be upon your guard against opening yourself too much among strangers. And again, I earnestly desire you would not attempt anything of this sort in a very public way. You may remember a simile I have sometimes used of *green fruit*. Children are impatient to have it while it is green—but people of more judgment will wait until it is ripe. Therefore I would wish your exhortations to be brief, private, and not very frequent. Rather give yourself to reading, meditation, and prayer.

As to *speaking without notes*, in order to do it successfully, a fund of knowledge must be first possessed. Indeed, in such societies as I hope you will confine your attempts to—it would not be practicable to use notes. But I mean, that if you design to come out as a preacher without notes from the first, you must use double diligence in study.

Your reading must not be confined to the Scriptures; you should be acquainted with church history, have a general view of theology, as a system, know something of the state of controversies in past times and at present, and indeed of the general history of mankind. I do not mean that you should enter deeply into these things; but you will need to have your mind enlarged, your ideas increased, your style and manner formed. You should read, think, write, compose, and use all diligence to exercise and strengthen your mental faculties. If you would speak *extempore* as a minister, you must be able to come off roundly, and to fill up your hour with various matter, in tolerable coherence, or else you will not be able to overcome the prejudice which usually prevails among the people. Perhaps it may be as well to use some little scheme in the *note* way, especially at the beginning. But a little trial will best inform you what is most expedient.

Let your backwardness to prayer and reading the Scripture be ever so great—you must strive against it. This backwardness, with the doubts you speak of, are partly from your own evil heart—but perhaps chiefly temptations of Satan. He knows, if he can keep you from drawing water out of the *wells of salvation*—he will have much advantage. My soul goes often mourning under the same complaints—but at times the Lord gives me a little victory. I hope he will overrule all our trials to make us more humble, dependent, and to give us tenderness of spirit towards the distressed. The exercised and experienced Christian, by the knowledge he has gained of his own heart, and the many difficulties he has had to struggle with—acquires a skill and compassion in dealing with others. Without such exercise, all our study, diligence, and gifts in other ways—would leave us much at a loss in some of the most important parts of our calling.

You have given yourself to the Lord for the ministry; his providence has thus far favored your views. Therefore harbor not a thought of

flinching from the battle, because the *enemy* appears in view—but resolve to endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Lift up your banner in his name; trust in him—and he will support you. But, above all things, be sure not to be either enticed or terrified from the privilege of a Throne of Grace.

Who *your enemies* are, or what they say, I know not; for I never conversed with them. Your friends here have thought you at times harsh and hasty in your manner, and rather inclining to self-confidence. These things I have often reminded you of; but I considered them as *blemishes* usually attendant upon youth—and which experience, temptation, and prayer, would correct. I hope and believe you will do well. You will have a share in my prayers and best advice; and when I see occasion to offer a word of reproof—I shall not use any reserve.

Letter 5

July 25, 1772.

Dear Sir,

I am glad to hear you are accommodated, where I hope your best endeavors will not be lacking to make yourself agreeable, by a humble, inoffensive, and circumspect behavior.

I greatly approve of your teaching one of the lessons in the afternoon. You will find it a great help to bring you gradually to that habit and readiness of expression which you desire; and you will perhaps find it make more impression upon your hearers—than what you read to them from the pulpit. However, I would not discourage or dissuade you from *reading your sermons* for a time. The chief inconvenience respecting yourself is that which you mention. A *written* sermon is something to lean upon—but it is best for a preacher to lean wholly

upon the Lord. But set off gradually; the Lord will not despise the day of small things. Pray heartily that your spirit may be right with him—and then all the rest will be well. And keep on writing. If you compose one sermon, and should find your heart enlarged to preach another, still your labor of writing will not be lost. If your conscience bears you witness that you desire to serve the Lord, his promise (now that he has brought you into the ministry) of a sufficiency and ability—for the work belongs to you as much as to another.

Your borrowing help from others, may arise from a self-distrust of yourself, which is not blamable; but it may arise in part likewise from a distrust of the Lord, which is hurtful. I wish you may get encouragement from that word, "Who makes mouths? Who makes people so they can speak or not speak, hear or not hear, see or not see? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and do as I have told you. I will help you speak well, and I will tell you what to say." Exo. 4:11-12. It was a great encouragement to me.

While I would press you to diligence in every rational means for the improvement of your stock in knowledge, and your ability of utterance—I would have you remember, that *true preaching is a gift* of God. It cannot be learned by industry and imitation only, as a man may learn to make a chair or a table. It comes from above; and if you patiently wait upon God, he will bestow this gift upon you, and increase it in you. It will grow by *exercise*. To him who *has*—shall *more* be given—and he shall have more abundantly. And be chiefly solicitous to obtain an *unction* upon what you do say. Perhaps those sermons in which you feel yourself most deficient—may be made most useful to others. I hope you will endeavor likewise to be *plain* and informal in your language and manner (though not base or vulgar), so as to suit yourself, as much as possible, to the minds of the most ignorant people. There are, in all congregations, some

people exceedingly ignorant—yet they have precious souls, and the Lord often calls such to be saved. I pray the Lord to make you wise to win souls. I hope he will.

You cannot be too jealous of your own heart. Cry to Him who is able to hold you up, that you may be safe—and you shall not cry in vain. It is indeed an alarming thought, that a man may pray and preach, be useful and acceptable for a time—and yet be nothing! But still the foundation of God stands sure. I have a good hope, that I shall never have cause to repent the part I have taken in your concerns. While you keep in the path of *duty*—you will find it the path of *safety*. Be punctual in waiting upon God in secret. This is the life of everything, the only way, and the sure way—of maintaining and renewing your strength.

The Deceitfulness of the Heart

by John Newton

"The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I know! I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve."
Jeremiah 17:9-10

The prophet Jeremiah had a hard task. He was appointed to inculcate unwelcome truths upon a vain insensible people. He had the grief to find all his expostulations and warnings, his prayers and tears, had no other effect than to make them account him their enemy, and to draw reproach and persecution upon himself. He lived to see the accomplishment of his own predictions; to see the land of

his nativity desolated, the city destroyed, the people almost extirpated, and the few who remained, transported into a distant country, to end their days in captivity!

Those who have resolved, honestly and steadily, to declare the Word of the Lord, have, in all ages, found a part of his trial; the message they have had to deliver has been disagreeable and disregarded. It is no hard matter to frame discourses that shall meet with some degree of general approbation; nor is it difficult to foresee the reception which plain truth must often meet with—but those who undertake a charge must perform it; and ministers are bound to declare to the people everything that regards their welfare, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. If the watchman sees the danger coming, and does not blow the trumpet, to give the most public notice possible, he is answerable for all the evils that may follow. This is applied as a caution to the prophet Ezekiel; and, undoubtedly, everyone who administers in holy things is concerned in it.

"So you, O son of man, I have set you a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore you shall hear the Word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked man, O wicked man, you shall surely die; if you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at your hand!" Ezekiel 33. Let this solemn passage plead our excuse, if, at any time, we seem too urgent, or too plain, in our discourses. Too plain or urgent we cannot be. Our business is most important; opportunities are critical and precious. It is at the hazard of our souls if we speak deceitfully; and at the hazard of yours if we speak in vain.

In the preceding verses, the prophet gives us a striking image of the opposition between the righteous and the wicked, in their present **state**, their hopes, and their end. The one is compared to a tree; the

other to heath and stubble; the one, planted by streams of water; the other, exposed on the burning desert; the one, green, flourishing, and full of fruit; the other, parched and withering; the hope of the one, fixed on the Lord, the all-sufficient Almighty God; the rash dependence of the other, on a frail feeble arm of flesh.

Suitable to this difference is their **end**. The one, blessed, provided against all evil, so that he shall not be anxious in the year of drought; the other, cursed, and cut off from the expectation of any amendment. "He shall not see when good comes." The immediate design was, perhaps, to show the Jews, that there was no way to avert the judgments of God, and to avoid the impending evils which threatened them, but by returning to the Lord, who had begun to *smite*, and who alone was able to *heal* them. But this they refused. They preferred their own contrivances: "they leaned upon an arm of flesh;" sometimes upon Egypt, sometimes upon Assyria; one while presuming upon *force*; another while upon *cunning*. They were fruitful in expedients; and, when one broken cistern failed them, had recourse to another. But the prophet denounces the curse of God both on them and their supports, subjoining the words of my text; which may be understood, either as a farther proof of what he had said, or an assigned cause of that obstinacy and perverseness he had complained of: "*The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?*"

But, without confining the words to the first occasion of their delivery, I shall consider them, as teaching us a doctrine, abundantly confirmed by many other passages of Scripture, that "*The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked,*" which I shall endeavor to illustrate in a plain familiar way.

I shall, secondly, from the next verse, enforce this observation, that the heart (as bad as it is) is incessantly under the Divine inspection and examination: "But I know! I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives!"

I shall, thirdly, consider the issue and design of this inquest; that "I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve." And may the Lord enable us so to try and examine *ourselves* here, that hereafter we may be found unblamable and without rebuke before him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I. The heart is here characterized, first, as **deceitful**, and that above or in all things.

Second, as **desperately wicked**—so bad, and in so deplorable a state, as is not to be conceived or fathomed. "Who really knows how bad it is?"

The word in the original, which we translate *desperately wicked*, signifies a mortal, incurable disease; a disease which, seizing on the vitals, affects and threatens the whole frame; and which no remedy can reach! This idea leads us to that first transgression, whereby man, departing from God, fatally destroyed his soul's health, and sunk into that state so pathetically described by Isaiah 1. "The whole *head* is sick;" all the powers of the understanding disordered. "And the whole *heart* is faint;" all, the springs of the affections enfeebled. "From the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness, but only wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores;" the evil growing worse continually, and no help or helper at hand! "They have not been closed nor bound up, nor mollified with ointment."

In consequence of this deep-rooted disorder, the heart is *deceitful*; that is, it deceives and fails us in every instance; it promises more

than it can perform; it misleads us with vain desires; and mocks us with unsuccessful efforts—like the faint attempts of a sick man, to perform those actions which require a state of sound health and strength. That this is indeed the case, will, I think, appear from the following particulars; to which I entreat your attention.

Scripture and reason do jointly assure us, that all we see is the work of an Almighty Being: the heavens and the earth, the sun, moon, and stars, and even the grass and flowers of the field, loudly proclaim the presence, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God—yet behold the extreme insensibility of man! The wisest of our species, in those places where Divine revelation was not known, ever mistook the *effect* for the *cause*; and ascribed that honor to the *creature* which is due only to the *Creator*. This was the very best of the case; for, in general, they sunk still lower, to worship stocks and stones! Nay, to the eternal reproach of the natural understanding in the things of God, the more civilized any nation was, the more renowned for arts and arms—the farther they were removed from those they termed *barbarians*, so much the more *vile* and *contemptible* the idolatry they established, generally proved! The wisdom of the Egyptians paid divine honors to cats, monkeys, and the vilest reptiles.

The fine taste of the *Greeks* consecrated those for gods, who, if they had lived among men, would have been deemed the pests of society; gods who were, professedly, both patterns and patrons of the most shameful vices! The *Romans*, "although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles!" So deeply were they infatuated, so totally lost to common sense, that the Apostle Paul's worst enemies could find no more plausible accusation against him, in one of the most civilized cities

then in the world, than that he had ventured to affirm, "that they were not gods—which were made with men's hands."

Thus stood the case with Heathen. Let us now come nearer home. It is to be feared, the greatest difference between them and the generality of us called Christians, is, that we do not partake in their gross outward idolatry. In other respects, our **insensibility** is perhaps as much greater than theirs, as our superior knowledge renders it more inexcusable. We acknowledge a God; that there is but one; that he is the cause of all things; that in him we live, and move, and have our being. Had the poor Heathen known this, we may judge, by their application to their mistaken worship, it would have had some influence on their practice. But what numbers of "us" live altogether as "without God in the world." I come not here to make invectives; let conscience judge, and give evidence accordingly.

What do we think of the perpetual *presence of God* around us? We know that he is acquainted with all our thoughts, words, and actions; yet are we not more effectually restrained and awed by the presence of our fellow-worms, than by the regard of that Eye which is ten thousand times brighter than the sun? How are we affected by the *works* of God? Has not the appearance of a fine day, or the beauty of an extensive prospect, a force to extort a sense of satisfaction from everyone? But how few are there of us, who can realize and acknowledge the hand of the glorious Author of these things? How seldom and how faintly, do we adopt the reflection of David? "When I consider the heavens, the work of YOUR fingers, the moon and stars which YOU have ordained; Lord, what is man that you should be mindful of him?" Psalm 8:1-9.

What is our judgment of the *Word* of God, that glorious message of love, in which he has pointed out to us the way of salvation? Is not

this book the least read, the least admired, and the least understood, of any? We are presently affected, we enter with all our spirit into the moving incidents (as we term them) of a romance or tragedy, though we know they are not founded on truth, nor have any relation to ourselves; but we can read the history of Jesus Christ, his life and doctrines, his death and passion, with indifference, though we say, all he spoke, or did, or suffered, was for our sakes.

What are our thoughts of that *eternity* to which we are posting, and to which, for anything we know, a few hours may introduce us? Is it not in the power of the smallest trifle that occurs, to hide this important point from our view? It were easy to multiply particulars; but are not these sufficient to show the deceitfulness, the desperate wickedness, of the heart?

Let me add one more: the *judgments of God* are now abroad in the world for these things. We have warnings all around us. We know that many fruitful lands in our neighborhood are, in a manner, turned into a wilderness, for the sins of the inhabitants. Every newspaper brings us tidings of some new desolation, and we cannot tell how soon the case may be our own; but we have neither sympathy for our fellow-creatures, nor concern for ourselves. We hear, we pity, we forget—in the same instant!

Is then what we see and feel more laid to heart? Our friends and acquaintances are taken from among us daily; some of them suddenly, in the midst of their warmest pursuits, or just upon the accomplishment of their most favorite schemes—we drop an unmeaning tear, and fly to every foolish vanity for relief. Perhaps we are afflicted ourselves, and brought down to the borders of the grave—but, even against this, we are, for the most part, armored. Or, if we feel a slight impression, it gradually wears off with the disease; and

we return, as soon as we recover, to our former follies with redoubled ardor!

This is a sketchy view of the insensibility of the human heart. Let us now consider its **ingratitude**. The Israelites were a sample of all mankind in this respect. God visited them, in Egypt, in the midst of their affliction. Without any application on their part, he undertook and effected their deliverance. He brought them from among their enemies "with a high hand, and a stretched-out arm!" He led them safely through the wilderness; he screened them with a cloud, from the piercing beams of the sun; he gave them light by night, in a pillar of fire; he fed them with bread from heaven, and caused streams to flow in the sandy desert; he made a covenant with them, and chose them for his peculiar people; he destroyed all their enemies before them; and, at length, put them in the full and peaceable possession of a land flowing with milk and honey.

Interwoven with the history of *God's gracious dealings with them*, we have an account of their behavior towards him; which was a continual series of rebellion, perverseness, murmuring, and disobedience! And are we better than they? Certainly not! If we had time to consider the natural, civil, and religious advantages we enjoy as a nation, it would appear that we likewise have long been a peculiarly favored people. The eye of the Lord our God has been upon us continually for good; and we have reason to say, "He has not dealt so with any nation!" The history of all ages and countries, affords us no instance of national *prosperity* that can be compared, either for degree or continuance, with what we have enjoyed since the Revolution; nor would it be easy, I fear, to find a parallel, in any history, of our great *ingratitude*! It is impossible that those who have so little sensibility, either of the value of the gifts of God, or of his

hand in bestowing them—can be *grateful*. The *seat* of gratitude is in the heart; the *proof* appears in the words and actions.

Now, what are the prevailing *subjects of conversation* among us? Are the great things that God has done for us, the high obligations we are under to him, the comforts of our holy religion, and the nature of that blessed hope set before us by the Gospel, in the number? On the contrary, is not the least hint of these things in company, for the most part, received with reserve, if not with contempt and disgust? "Out of the abundance of the heart—the mouth speaks." God, and the things of God, have little place there; but levity, detraction, ill temper, and, not seldom, profaneness and obscenity, in our discourses, too plainly reveal the nature of the fountain from whence they flow. And if we look upon the *actions* of men in general, they are but of a piece with their *words*—engrossed by business, or enslaved to pleasure, for a season, all upon the stretch in amassing treasures; and then, perhaps, as restless and eager to waste them! Whatever passion rules them for the time, or whatever changes they may admit in their schemes—it is too plain, that a principle of gratitude to God, and a conscious desire to please him, has little influence either in forming or executing their plans. If these things are so, we have another instance of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the heart—it is *full of the blackest ingratitude!*

Need anything be added to these two charges? Have we not said enough to confirm the prophet's assertion? If not, we can name a third particular, if possible, more absurd and inexcusable than either of the former. Man is not only *insensible* of the greatest part of those things which most concern him, and *ungrateful* and *disobedient* to his Maker and Preserver, his best and only friend—but he is *proud* too! Though he has nothing but what he has received; though he has received nothing but what he has perverted and mismanaged, and

must render a strict account of his mismanagement, yet he is proud! We have already seen his *blindness* and *baseness*; only *pride* was lacking, to make him a monster indeed! And need we spend time to prove this? No! Pride is a universal evil. Any man may easily perceive it in every other man, but not in himself! And every thinking man may perceive it working within himself incessantly. Whether we are alone or in company, whether with friends or enemies, with those above us or those below us, pride will insinuate itself!

Nay, in the immediate presence of God, when we come together to implore his mercy, while the most humbling confessions are upon our lips, and we are charging ourselves as most miserable, helpless sinners—even here pride will find us out! Those must be great strangers to themselves, who are not sensible of this. Now, "why is dust and ashes proud?" Proud of our failings! Proud of our infirmities! Is it not from hence, because the heart is deplorably *diseased*, desperately *wicked*, and deeply *deceitful*!

I shall pursue this point no farther. I shall not attempt to enumerate, at present, those "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, and blasphemies," Mark 7:21, which our Lord assures us do perpetually "proceed from the heart." I chose to insist on *insensibility*, *ingratitude*, and *pride*—because these are the vices which, in common life, we most condemn, are willing to think ourselves most free from, and can the least bear to be charged with. And it must be allowed, that, between man and man, there is often the appearance of much generosity, gratitude, and condescension. But what will it avail us, that we stand upon some tolerable terms towards each other in these respects, if we are guilty before God? "I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives!" He cannot be deceived or put off with a fair external appearance! This is the next point to be considered.

II. That the heart, with all its workings and all its faults, is incessantly under the Divine inspection and examination, "I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives!" The *heart* and *motives*, as distinguished in Scripture phrase, signify those different powers of the mind, the affections, and the thoughts. The words *search* and *examine* have an emphasis in the original, which cannot be reached without a paraphrase, if at all.

The heart, with all its deceitful and wicked workings—is incessantly under the Divine inspection and examination! The Lord searches the heart—He traces and investigates, the inmost principles of our souls and their motives, with the utmost exactness!

To form a more just idea of this scrutiny, let us ask ourselves—how we could bear to be compelled to declare aloud, in full company—every thought, wish and desire which pass through our minds—with no exception! People, if they were brought to this trial, would rather choose to die than comply with it.

The Lord has mercifully kept us from the knowledge of each other's hearts, any farther than we are willing to disclose ourselves. If every man was compelled to speak all that he thinks—there would be an end of human society; and man would no more venture to dwell with man, than with tigers and bears!

We know what mischief one ungoverned tongue may sometimes occasion; now, the tongue can do no evil, any farther than as it is an instrument of disclosing the hidden things of the heart; yet it is but a small part of these, that the worst tongue is capable of disclosing! What then would be the case, if all our hearts were open, all our evil thoughts, motives and desires known to one another? What a mixture of confusion, defiance, shame, rage, fear, and contempt—would overspread every countenance!

And yet, we are thus exposed to the searching eye of a pure and holy God! The Lord knows the thoughts of man's heart, that they are vain. He long ago declared the result of His observation. "God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually!" And, though the world was drowned for this—matters were not mended afterwards; for, upon a second survey, His judgment amounts to the same. "The Lord looks down from heaven on the entire human race; He looks to see if there is even one with real understanding, one who seeks for God. But no, all have turned away from God! All have become corrupt! No one does good, not even one!" Psalm 14:1-7, Isaiah 59. Compare Romans 3.

How it was in our blessed Savior's time we have already observed; and neither Scripture nor experience give us reason to hope it has been better since, or is now. The Apostle Paul has assured us, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; having a form of godliness but denying its power." 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Surely, I say, if these are marks of the last days, they must be already commenced. However, we see, upon the whole, how vile and hateful our hearts must appear in the sight of a heart-searching God!

III. One thing more we have to consider; That the Lord does not observe the heart of man with the indifference of a mere spectator, but as an impartial and inflexible Judge! "But I know! I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their

due rewards, according to what their actions deserve!" This was the third particular to be spoken to.

But, alas! what can be said to this? Is it not sufficient to fill our souls with dread—to hear, that the Lord has purposed to "give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve"; and that He sits as Judge, not only upon *outward actions*, but examines the very *thoughts* and *intents* of the heart! Can any of us stand under such a trial? Which of us will presume to say, 'I am clean?' To what purpose can any of us plead, I have not committed adultery—if God charges us with every lustful thought, and every offense of the eye? What will it avail, that we have never killed our neighbor—if every angry word, every degree of ill-will or revenge, is considered as murder in God's sight? It will not suffice to say, I am no thief or extortioner—if we have ever coveted what was the property of another?

If we have at any time mentioned, or even thought of, the name of God, without the highest habitual reverence, we have taken his name in vain; and he has declared he will not hold us guiltless. That this is no interpretation of my inventing, but the very words of truth, the declaration of Him by whom we must be one day judged, Matthew 5, will inform you. There a wanton glance is styled adultery; an angry expression censured as murder; and to speak unadvisedly, even of the hairs of our head, is deemed a branch of profane swearing. And why? Because all these spring from the heart, which is "naked and open," without either covering or concealment, "in the sight of him with whom we have to do;" Hebrews 4.

This is thought uncomfortable doctrine, and not without reason, could we go no farther. For there is nothing in heaven or in earth, in time or eternity, which affords the least glimpse of comfort to fallen

man, if either God is strict to mark what is amiss, or if he, trusting in himself, presumes to plead with his Maker. The Divine law requires perfect, unremitted, unsinning obedience; it denounces a curse upon the least failure. "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" Galatians 3:10. Everyone, without exception of person or circumstance, that continues not, from the beginning to the end of life, in all things, great and small, to do them, to finish them, to do them completely, without any defect either in matter or manner! Most uncomfortable doctrine indeed, were there no remedy provided! For the law of God is as eternal and unchangeable as his nature; it must not, it cannot be lessened or brought down to our capacities; neither can the penalty be evaded; for the God of truth has said, has sworn, that "the soul that sins—shall surely die!" Ezekiel 18:4. Here then we must receive" a sentence of death in ourselves," 2 Corinthians 1:9. Here, "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God," Romans 3:19. Here we must say with the Apostle, "Therefore, by the deeds of the law, there shall be no flesh justified in his sight!" Galatians 2:16; "for by the law is the knowledge of sin," Romans 3:20.

O that we could all sincerely say so; that we were brought to this—to feel and confess our lost, undone estate, and our utter inability to save ourselves! Then, with joy, would I proceed to what I have had in my eye all along. For with what view have I said so much upon so disagreeable a subject? Why have I attempted to lay open some of the depths of the heart? but that I might more fully illustrate the wonderful grace and goodness of God, given to us in the Gospel; and, at the same time, show the utter impossibility, not of being saved at all, but of finding salvation in any other way than that which God has appointed.

For, behold! "God has so loved the world," that he sent his Son to accomplish that for us, "which the law could not do through the weakness of our flesh." Jesus Christ performed perfect obedience to the law of God in our behalf; He died, and satisfied the penalty due to our sins; He arose from the grave as our representative; He is entered into heaven as our forerunner. "He has received gifts for men, even for the rebellious," Psalm 68. He is "exalted" on high, to "bestow repentance and remission of sins," Acts 5, on all who seek to him. He has established his ordinances for this purpose; He has commanded his people, not to "neglect assembling themselves together." He has charged his ministers, at such seasons, to declare first the guilty, deplorable condition of mankind, and then to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation, "by faith in him." He has promised to be with them in this work to the end of the world. He has promised, that where his Word is faithfully preached, he will accompany it "with a spirit and power," that shall bear down all opposition. He has promised, that while *we are speaking to the ear*—that he will, by his secret influence, apply it to the *heart*, and open it to receive and embrace the truth spoken, as in the case of Lydia.

Who would venture to preach a doctrine so unpalatable to the carnal mind, as Jesus Christ, and him crucified? Who would undertake so ungrateful a task, as to depreciate that noble creature man, and arraign him publicly of *insensibility, ingratitude, pride, and deceit*; were it not that we have, first, a command, and that at our peril, to speak plain; and, secondly, a promise that we shall not speak in vain? Not that we can expect to be universally received; the time is come, when many "will not endure sound doctrine," 2 Timothy 4:3; but some there will be, whom God is pleased to save by the *foolishness of preaching*, so called.

Some such I would hope are in this assembly. To such I say—do not attempt to satisfy the Divine justice by any poor performances of your own! Do not think to cleanse or expiate the evil of your hearts by any of your own inventions; but, "behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," John 1:29. He died, that you may live; He lives, that you may live forever. Put, therefore, your trust in the Lord; for with him is plenteous redemption. His sufferings and death are a complete final atoning sacrifice for sin. "He is *able* to save to the uttermost;" and he is as *willing* as he is *able*. It was this brought him down from heaven; for this he emptied himself of all glory, and submitted to all indignity, shame and suffering! His humiliation expiates our pride; his perfect love atones for our ingratitude; his exquisite tenderness pleads for our insensibility. Only believe! Commit your cause to him by faith and prayer.

As a *Priest*, he shall make atonement for your sins, and present your persons and your services acceptable before God. As a *Prophet*, he shall instruct you in the true wisdom, which makes wise to salvation; he shall not only cause you to *know* his commandments, but to *love* them too; he shall write them in your hearts! As a *King*, he shall evermore mightily defend you against all your enemies. He shall enable you to withstand temptations, to support under difficulties, to break through all opposition. He shall supply you with everything you need, for this life, out of the unsearchable riches of his grace. He shall strengthen you to overcome all things; to endure to the end! And then he shall give you a place in his kingdom; a seat near his throne; a crown of life; and a crown of glory! "For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay!" 1 Peter 1:4

On All Things Being Given Us with Christ

by John Newton

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Romans 8:32

Various have been the disputes and various the mistakes of men, concerning the things of God. Too often, amidst the heat of fierce contending parties, TRUTH is *injured* by both sides, *befriended* by neither. Religion, the pretended cause of our many controversies, is sometimes wholly unconcerned in them: I mean, that "pure and undefiled religion," that "wisdom which, coming from above," abounds with proof of its Divine original, being "pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy," James 3. True religion is a serious and a personal concern. It arises from a right knowledge of *God* and *ourselves*; a sense of the great things he has done for fallen man; a persuasion, or at least a well-grounded hope, of our own interest in his favor; and a principle of unbounded love to him who thus first loved us. It consists in an entire surrender of ourselves, and our all, to God; in setting him continually before us, as the object of our desires, the scope and inspector of our actions, and our only refuge and hope in every trouble: finally, in making the goodness of God to us the motive and model of our behavior to our fellow-creatures: to love, pity, relieve, instruct, forbear, and forgive them, as occasions offer, because we ourselves both need and experience these things at the hand of our heavenly Father.

The two great points to which true religion tends, and which it urges the soul, where it has taken place, incessantly to press after, are, communion with God, and conformity to him; and as neither of these can be fully attained in this life, it teaches us to pant after a

better life; to withdraw our thoughts and affections from temporal things, and fix them on that eternal state, where our desires shall be abundantly satisfied; and the work begun by *grace*—shall be crowned with *glory*!

Such is the religion of the Gospel, which the life and doctrine of our Lord, and the writings of his Apostles, jointly recommend. An excellent abridgment of the whole we have in this eighth chapter to the Romans, describing the state, temper, practice, privileges, and immovable security, of a true Christian. Every verse is rich in comfort and instruction, and might, without violence, afford a theme for volumes. Particularly, that verse which I have read may be styled a complete and comprehensive epitome of whatever is truly worthy our knowledge and our hope. The limits of our time are too narrow to admit any previous remarks on the context, or indeed to consider the subject according to the order of an exact division. Therefore I shall not at present use any artificial method; but, taking the words as they lie, I shall offer a few practical observations, which seem naturally and immediately to arise from the perusal of them, making such improvement as may occur as I go along. And may the Father of mercies, who has put this treasure into our hands, favor us with his gracious presence and blessing.

I. From the words, "*He spared not his own Son,*" we may observe, in one view, the ***wonderful goodness and inflexible severity of God***. So great was his goodness, that, when man was by sin rendered incapable of any happiness, and obnoxious to all misery; incapable of restoring himself, or of receiving the least assistance from any power in heaven or in earth; God spared not his only begotten Son—but, in his unparalleled love to the world, gave him, who alone was able to repair the breach. Every gift of God is good: the bounties of his *common providence* are very valuable; that he should continue life,

and supply that life with food, clothing, and a variety of comforts, to those who by rebellion had forfeited all, was astonishing! But what are all *inferior* blessings, compared to this *unspeakable* gift of the Son of his love?

Abraham had given many proofs of his love and obedience before he was commanded to offer up Isaac upon the altar; but God seems to pass by all that went before, as of small account in comparison of this last instance of duty: "Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me," Genesis 22. Surely we likewise must say, "In this was manifested the love of God to us—that he gave his Son, his only Son, to be the life of the world." But all comparison fails: Abraham was bound in duty, bound by gratitude; neither was it a free-will offering—but by the express command of God; but to us the mercy was *undesired*, as well as *undeserved*. "Herein is love—not that we loved God;" on the contrary, we were enemies to him, and in rebellion against him, "but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins," the sins we had committed against himself. My friends, ought not this love to meet a return? Is it not most desirable to be able to say, with the Apostle, upon good grounds, "We love him—because he first loved us?" Should it not be our continual inquiry, "What shall we render to the Lord—for all his benefits?" especially for this, which is both the crown and the spring of all the rest! Are we cold and unaffected at this astonishing proof of Divine love? and are not our hearts grieved and humbled at our own ingratitude? Then are we ungrateful and insensible indeed!

The *justice* and *severity* of God is no less conspicuous than his *goodness*, in these words: "as he spared not to give his Son for our sakes," so, when Christ appeared in our nature, undertook our cause, and was charged with our sins, though he was the Father's well-

beloved Son, "he was not spared." He drank the bitter cup of the wrath of God to the very dregs: he bore all the shame, sorrow, and pain, all the distress of body and mind, that must otherwise have fallen upon our heads. His whole life, from the manger to the cross—was one series of humiliation and suffering. Consider him in the wilderness—given up to the power and assaulted by the temptations of the devil! Observe him in the world—despised, vilified, persecuted even to death, by unreasonable and wicked men; ridiculed, buffeted, spit upon; and at length nailed to the accursed tree! Behold him in the garden, and say, "Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow, with which the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger?"

How inconceivable must that agony be, which caused his blood to forsake its usual channels, and drop from every pore of his body! Behold him, lastly, upon the cross, suffering the most painful and ignominious death; suspended between two thieves; surrounded by cruel enemies, who made sport of his pangs; derided by all who passed by! Attend to his dolorous cry, expressive of an inward distress beyond all we have yet spoken of, "My God, my God—why have you forsaken me!"

Paul reminds the Galatians, that, by his preaching among them, Jesus Christ had been "evidently set forth crucified before their eyes." The punishment due to the sins of all that shall stand at the last day on the right hand of God, met and centered in Christ, the Lamb of expiation; nor was the dreadful weight removed until he, triumphant in death, pronounced "It is finished!" Let us not think of this as a matter of speculation only; our lives, our precious souls, are concerned in it. Let us infer from hence, how "fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God!" The Apostle Peter admonishes those to whom he wrote from the fearful example of the angels who sinned, and of the old world; where the same word is used as in my

text, "he spared them not;" that is, he punished them to the utmost; he did not afford them the least mitigation. It is a frequent figure of speech, by which much more is understood than is or can be expressed.

Much more then may we say, if God "spared not his Son—what shall be the end of those who obey not the Gospel?" If the holy Jesus was thus dealt with, when he was only accounted a sinner by imputation, where shall the impenitent and the ungodly appear? The punishment of sin in the soul in a future state is twofold: the wrath of God in all its dreadful effects, typified by fire unquenchable; and the stings of *conscience*, represented by a *worm that never dies*. Our Lord endured the former; but the other, perhaps, could have no place in him, who was absolutely perfect and sinless. But if the prospect of one made him astonished and sorrowful beyond measure, what consternation must the concurrence of both raise in the wicked, when they shall hear and feel their irrevocable doom! May we have grace so to reflect on these things, that we may flee for safety to the hope set before us, to Jesus Christ, the only and the sure refuge from that approaching storm, which "shall sweep away all the workers of iniquity as a flood."

II. Here, as in a looking-glass, we may see the **evil of sin**. The bitter fruits of sin are indeed visible everywhere. Sin is the cause of all the labor, sickness, pain, and grief under which the whole creation groans. Sin often makes man a terror and a burden, both to himself and those about him. Sin occasions discord and confusion in families, cities, and kingdoms. Sin has always directed the march, and ensured the success, of those *instruments* of Divine vengeance, whom we style mighty conquerors. Those ravages of mankind, which spread devastation and horror far and wide, and ruin more in a few days than ages can repair, have only afforded so many melancholy

proofs of the malignity of sin. For sin, a shower of flaming brimstone fell upon a whole country. For sin, an overwhelming deluge destroyed a whole world. For sin, principalities and powers were cast down from heaven, and are reserved under chains of darkness, to a more dreadful doom. But none of these things, nor all of them together, afford such a conviction of the heinous nature and destructive effects of sin, as we may gather from these words, "*He spared not his own Son!*"

III. Here we may likewise see the **value of the human soul**. We ordinarily judge of the worth of a thing—by the price which a wise man, who is acquainted with its intrinsic value, is willing to give for it. Now, the soul of man was of such estimation in the sight of God, who made it, that, when it was sinking into endless ruin, "he spared not his own Son—but freely delivered him for our ransom." Two things especially render the soul thus important in the view of Infinite Wisdom:

First, the *capacity* he had given it; for "he formed it for himself," capable of knowing, serving, and enjoying God; and, by consequence, incapable of happiness in anything beneath him; for nothing can satisfy any being but the attainment of its proper end.

Secondly, the *duration* he had assigned it, beyond the limits of time, and the existence of the material world. The most excellent and exalted being, if only the creature of a day, would be worthy of little regard. On the other hand, immortality itself would be of small value to a creature that could rise no higher than the pursuits of animal life. But in the *soul of man* the capability of complete *happiness* or complete *misery*, and that forever, make it a prize worthy the contention of worlds!

At length the Word of God appeared "in the likeness of sinful flesh," that, in our nature, he might encounter and subdue sin, the sworn enemy of our species. All that has been transacted in the kingdoms of providence and grace, from the beginning of the world, has been in subservience to this grand point—the *redemption of the deathless soul*.

And is it so—and shall there be found among us numbers utterly insensible of their natural dignity; who dare disparage the plan of Infinite Wisdom, and stake those souls for *trifles*—souls which nothing less than the blood of Christ could redeem? There is need to use great plainness of speech; the matter is of the utmost weight; be not therefore offended that I would warn you against "the deceitfulness of sin." Do not allow your hearts to be entangled in the vanities of the world; either they will fail, and disappoint you in life—or at least you must leave them behind you when you die. You must enter an invisible unknown state, where you cannot expect to meet any of those amusements or engagements which you now find so necessary to trifle away the *tedious load of time* that hangs upon your hands. You, to whom a few hours of leisure time are so burdensome, have you considered how you shall be able to support an eternity of time in hell? You stand upon a brink, and all about you is uncertainty. You see, of your acquaintances, some one or another daily called away—some who are as likely to live as yourselves. You know not but you may be the very next. You cannot be certain—but "You fool—this very night your soul may be required of you!" Perhaps a few hours may introduce you into the presence of that God whom you have been so little desirous to please. And can you, in such a situation, sport and play, with as little concern as the lamb already marked out for the slaughter tomorrow? Oh! That is astonishing! How fatally has the *god of this world* has blinded your eyes! and how

dreadful must your situation be in death—if death alone can undeceive you!

IV. Lastly, We may gather from these words the **certainty of the Gospel salvation**. God himself delivered up his Son for us all. He declared himself well pleased with him, as our Surety, upon his first entrance on his work; and testified his acceptance of his undertaking, in that he raised him from the dead, and received him into heaven as our Advocate. Now, "if God himself is thus for us—who can be against us?" If he who only has right to *judge* us—is pleased to *justify* us, "who can lay anything to our charge? If Christ who has died for our sins, and has risen on our behalf—has engaged to "intercede for us, who shall condemn?" "There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

Nor is this all; but everything we stand in need of is fully provided; and we may well argue, as the Apostle has taught us elsewhere, "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life," or, as in the passage before us, "He who spared not his own Son—but delivered him up for us all," when we were alienated from him, "how shall he not with him freely give us all things," now he has taught us to pray, and given us his own promises to plead for all we ask?

This brings me to the *second clause of the text*; only it may be proper, before I enter upon it, to add two cautions, to prevent mistakes from what has been already said.

1st, Let us remember that **all is free gift**. He *gave* his Son—he *gives* all things with him. The Gospel allows no place for *merit* of our own in any respect. There was no moving cause *in us*, unless *our misery* may is deemed such. Our deliverance, in its rise, progress, and

accomplishment, must be ascribed to grace alone; and he who would glory, must "glory in the Lord."

2d, Let us observe the Apostle's phrase. He says, not *absolutely for all*—but *for us all*; that is, those who are described in the former part of the chapter, "who are led by the Spirit of God, who walk not after the flesh, who are delivered from the bondage of corruption," who have liberty to call God, "Abba, Father," and prove their relation by following him as "dear children." Christ is "the author of eternal salvation, only to those only who obey him," Hebrews 5:14. It cannot be otherwise, since a branch of that salvation is to deliver us "from our sins," and "from the present evil world," to "purify us from dead works, to serve the living God." "Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows—he will also reap. He who sows to the flesh, shall," notwithstanding all that Christ has done or suffered, yes so much the rather, "from the flesh reap corruption."

The text, having declared that God spared not his Son for our sakes, proceeds to infer, that "**with him he will assuredly give us all things.**" Here we may take notice, first, that the words *all things* must be limited to such as are needful and good for us. It may be said of many of our desires, "You know not what you ask for," in such cases, the best answer we can receive, is a *denial*. For those blessings which God has promised absolutely to give, such as pardon, grace, and eternal life, we cannot be too earnest or explicit in our prayers; but in *temporal* things we should be careful to ask nothing but with submission to the Divine will. The promises, it is true, appertain to "the life that now is, as well as that which is to come." "Whether things present, or things to come; all are ours, if we are Christ's." But the particular giving of these things, God has reserved in his own hands, to bestow them as best shall suit our various tempers, abilities, and occasions. And well for us that it is so—for we would

soon ruin ourselves if left to our own choice. Like children who are fond to meddle with what would hurt them—but refuse the most beneficial medicines, if unpalatable; so we often pursue, with earnestness and anxiety, those things which, if we could obtain them, would greatly harm, if not destroy, us! Often, too, with a rash and blind impatience, we struggle to avoid or escape those *difficulties* which God sees fit to appoint for the most gracious and merciful purposes:

to correct our pride and vanity,
to exercise and strengthen our faith,
to wean us from the world,
to teach us a closer dependence upon himself, and
to awaken our desires after our glorious inheritance.

Again; as God, by his promise freely to give us all things, has not engaged to comply with the measure of our unreasonable short-sighted wishes; so neither has he confined himself as to the *time* or *manner* of bestowing his gifts. The blessing we seek, though perhaps not wholly improper, may be at present *unseasonable*. In this case, the Lord will suspend it until he sees it will afford us the comfort and satisfaction he intends us by it—and then we shall be sure to have it. Sometimes it is withheld to stir us up to fervency and importunity in our *prayers*, sometimes to make it doubly welcome and *valuable* when it comes.

So likewise as to the *manner*. We ask for a certain thing—and he gives us an equivalent in something else; and when we come to weigh all things, we see cause to say that his choice was best! Thus David acknowledges: "In the day that I called, you answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul," Psalm 138:1-8. David

asked for *deliverance* from trouble; the Lord gave him *strength* to bear it; and he says that his prayer was fully answered.

A parallel case the Apostle records: he besought the Lord three times for the removal of that trial which he calls "a thorn in the flesh." The answer he received was, "My grace is sufficient for you." Such an assurance of God's grace, was more valuable than the *deliverance* he sought could be.

Sometimes we seek a thing in a way of our own, by means and instruments of our own devising. God crosses our feeble purposes, that he may give us the pleasure of receiving it immediately from himself. It would be easy to enlarge on this head. Let it suffice us to know, that our concerns are in his hands who "does all things well;" and who will, and does, appoint "all things to work together for our good."

From the latter clause, thus limited and explained, many useful directions might be drawn. I shall only mention two or three, and conclude.

1st, Since we are told, that God freely gives us all things—let us learn to see and acknowledge his hand in all we have, and in all we meet with. "Not even a sparrow, worth only half a penny, can fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father! And the very hairs on your head are all numbered!" Matthew 10:29-30. Such a deep and abiding persuasion of the Most High God, ordering, and over-ruling all our concerns, would—like the light—diffuse a luster and a beauty upon everything around us. To consider every comfort of life, as an effect and proof of God's favor towards us, would, like the fabled magic stone—turn all our possessions to gold, and stamp a value upon things which a common eye might judge insignificant.

The eye of Divine Providence is upon every sparrow of the field. Nor can we properly term any circumstance of our lives as small, since such things as seem most trifling in themselves, do often give birth to those which become most important. On the other hand—to be able to discover the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father, through the darkest cloud of troubles and afflictions; to see all our trials appointed to us, in number, weight, and measure; nothing befalling us by chance, nothing without need, nothing without a support, nothing without a designed advantage—what a support must these truths be to the soul!

Take away these, and man is the most forlorn, helpless, miserable object in the world; pining for everything he has not, trembling for everything he has; equally suffering under the pressure of what does happen, and the fear of what may happen; liable to thousands of unsuspected dangers, yet unable to guard against those which are most obvious!

Were there no future life, it would be our interest to be truly and uniformly religious, in order to make the most of this life. How unhappy must they be to whom the thoughts of an *ever present God* is a burden they strive, in vain, to shake off! But let us learn "to acknowledge him in all our ways," and then "he will direct and bless our paths."

2nd, Since all we have is the gift of God, let us learn the secret of being content in any and every situation. Our heavenly Father knows what we have need of, before we ask him." "The earth is his, and the fullness thereof;" and his goodness is equal to his power; a proof of which we have in the text. He has already given us more than ten thousand worlds.

Are you **poor**? Be satisfied with the Lord's appointment. It were as easy to him to give you large estates, as to supply you with the bread you eat, or to continue your breath in your nostrils; but he sees that poverty is best for you—he sees that prosperity might prove your ruin! Therefore he has appointed you the honor of being in this respect, conformable to your Lord, who, when on earth, "had nowhere to lay his head!"

Have any of you **lost** a dear friend or relative, in whose life you thought your own lives bound up? "Be still, and know that he is God!" It was God who gave you that friend; his blessing made your friend a comfort to you; and though the *stream* is now cut off—the *fountain* is still full. Do not be like a wild bull in a net! The Lord has many ways to turn your mourning into joy.

Are any of you **sick**? Think how the compassionate Jesus healed diseases with a word, in the days of his flesh. Has he not the same *power* now—as then? Has he not the same *love*? Has he, in his exalted state, forgotten his poor languishing people here below? No! He still retains his sympathy: "he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities; he knows our frame; he remembers we are but dust!" It is because sickness is better for you than health, that he thus visits you. He dealt in the same manner with Lazarus, whom he loved. Resign yourselves, therefore, to his wisdom, and repose in his love. There is a land where the blessed inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick," and there "all who love the Lord Jesus" shall shortly be.

Are any of you **tempted**? "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him!" Sure you need no other argument to be content, or, shall I say? to rejoice, and be exceeding glad. "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,

and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Be it in poverty or losses, in body or mind, in your own person or another's, it is all appointed by God, and shall issue in your great benefit, if you are of the number of those that love him.

3rd, Since it is said that all things are freely given us in and together with Christ, let us "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure." Let us give diligence to know that we have an interest in him and his mediation; and then (if I may borrow a common expression) *we are made forever!* The Lord Jesus Christ, sent from God on a merciful errand to a lost world, did not come empty—no, he is fraught with all blessings, suitable to all people, extending to all times, enduring to all eternity! O make it your great care to know him and to please him; study his Word, call upon his name, frequent his ordinances, observe his sayings, seek to know him as the only way to God—the way to pardon, peace, and Divine communion here, and to complete happiness hereafter. When once you can say, "My beloved is mine!" —I account all his interest my own. "And I am his," —I have given myself up to him without reserve; then you will, you must be happy. You will be a partaker in all the blessings of all his attributes and perfections. His *wisdom* will be your high tower, his *providence* your constant shield, his *love* your continual solace. "He will give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways."

In times of difficulty—he will direct your counsels; in times of danger—he will fill you with comfort, and "keep" you "in perfect peace," when others quake for fear. He will bless your basket and your store, your substance and your families. Your days shall happily pass in doing your Father's will, and receiving renewed tokens of his favor; and at night you shall lie down, and your sleep shall be sweet. When

afflictions befall you (for these likewise are the fruits of God's love), you shall see your God near at hand, "a very present help in trouble;" you shall find your strength increased in proportion to your trial; you shall in due time be restored, as gold from the furnace, purified sevenfold, to praise your great Deliverer.

Everything you meet in life shall yield you profit; and **death**, which puts a fatal end to the hope of the wicked—death, at whose name thousands turn pale—shall to you be an entrance into a new and endless life! He who tasted death for you, and sanctified it to you, shall lead and support you through that dark valley! You shall shut your eyes upon the things of time—to open them the next moment in the blissful presence of your reconciled God! You, who a minute before were surrounded by weeping, helpless friends—shall in an instant be transported and inspired to join in that glorious song, "To Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests to God and his Father! To him be glory and strength, forever and ever. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!" Thus, "blessed shall the man be—who fears the Lord!" "Thus shall it be done—to him whom the King delights to honor!" Amen.!

A Letter to a Young Minister, on Preaching the Gospel with the Power and Demonstration of the Spirit

Dear sir,

I congratulate you on your ordination. The Lord has now, by his providence, opened to you a door into His vineyard, and has called you to a scene of service, in which I hope the abilities he has given you will be faithfully employed, and your desire of usefulness will be abundantly gratified. You now bear the high and *honorable* title of a *minister of the gospel*--I call it high and honorable, because I am sure those who truly deserve it, will find it to be so at last; though at present perhaps they may meet with much opposition and contempt, for the sake of him whose they are, and whom they serve.

I wish you, upon your entrance into the ministry, to have a formed and determinate idea, what the phrase, *preaching the gospel*, properly signifies. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation; and this gospel is preached when it is accompanied with some due degree of that demonstration and power from on high, which is necessary to bring it home to the hearts and consciences of the hearers. Thus the apostle Peter informs us, "that it was preached in the beginning, with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven;" and Paul reminds the Thessalonians, "that they had received it not in word only--but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance."

From these passages, I think we may warrantably conclude, that merely to *declare* the truths of the gospel, is not to *preach* it. The knowledge of it as a 'system of truth' may be acquired, and of course recited by those who have no portion or tincture of that inward

conviction of its important certainty, which is necessary to impress a correspondent conviction upon others. Though the Lord himself is *the only effectual Teacher*, and that change of disposition which is frequently produced by the preaching of the gospel, must be ascribed wholly to his agency--yet in the *means* he has instituted, and by which he has ordinarily pleased to work, we may observe a suitability to the nature of man, considered as a rational intelligent creature, whose inward feelings are excited by external causes, in a manner agreeable to the general laws of his constitution in the present state. I may particularly notice on this subject, the wonderful and well known effects of what we call *sympathy*, by which we often see the emotions of anger, pity, terror, and the like, with which one person is affected, when strongly expressed by his words or actions, suddenly and almost irresistibly awaken similar sensations in those who observe him.

Many of the great truths of the Scripture may be represented by a man of a warm and lively imagination, in such a manner as considerably to affect the imaginations and natural passions of an audience, even though he should not himself believe a word of the subject. This would be an effect of no higher kind, than is produced upon *the stage*. The exertions of a skillful actor first drawn forth by the sight of the spectators, and a desire to please them, act upon them reciprocally, and give him an ascendancy over their feelings. When his attention seems to be fixed, when he appears to enter into the distresses of the character which he represents, he fixes their attention likewise, they also are distressed--and, while *he* weeps or *trembles*--they weep or tremble with him, and though at the same time both he and they are very sensible that the whole representation is a *fiction*, and consequently when the *play* is finished, the emotions cease. This is all very natural, and may easily be accounted for.

It is not so easy to account for the presumption of those preachers, who expect, (if they can indeed expect it,) merely by declaiming on gospel subjects, to raise in their hearers those spiritual perceptions of humiliation, desire, love, joy, and peace, of which they have no impression on their own hearts. I premise, therefore, that there is one species of popularity which I hope will rather be the object of your *dread*--than of your ambition. It is a poor affair to be a *stage-player* in divinity, to be able to hold a congregation by the ears, by furnishing them with an hour's amusement, if this is all. But the man who *is* what he *professes* to be, who knows what he speaks of, in whom the truth dwells and lives, who has not received the gospel from books, or by hearers only--but in the school of the great Teacher, acquires a discernment, a taste, a tenderness, and a humility, which secure to him the approbation of the judicious, qualify him for the consolation of the distressed, and even so far open his way to the hearts of the prejudiced, that, if they refuse to be persuaded, they are often convicted in their own consciences, and forced to feel that God is with the preacher.

When Philip preached, the Eunuch rejoiced; when Paul preached, Felix trembled. The power of the truth was equally evident in both cases, though the *effects* were different. One criterion of the gospel ministry, when rightly dispensed, is, that it enters the recesses of the heart. The hearer is amazed to find that the preacher, who perhaps never saw him before, describes him to himself, as though he had lived long in the same house with him, and was acquainted with his conduct, his conversation, and even with his secret thoughts! 1 Cor. 14:24-25. Thus, a single sentence frequently awakens a long train of recollection, removes scruples, satisfies doubts, and leads to the happiest consequences; and what we read of Nathaniel and the woman of Samaria, is still exemplified in the conversion of many;

while others, who willfully resist the evidence, and turn from the light, which forces itself upon their minds, are left without excuse.

If, therefore, you wish to preach the gospel with power, pray for a simple, humble spirit, that you may have no allowed end in view--but to proclaim the glory of the Lord whom you profess to serve, to do his will, and for his sake to be useful to the souls of men. Study the Word of God, and the workings of your own heart, and avoid all those connections, friendships and pursuits, which, experience will tell you, have a tendency to dampen the energy, or to blunt the sensibility of your spirit. Thus shall you come forth as a scribe, well instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, approved of God, acceptable to men, rightly dividing the Word of truth. Thus your trumpet shall not give an *uncertain sound*, nor shall you appear like a *cloud without water*, to raise and disappoint the expectations of your hearers. A just confidence of the truths you speak, a sense of the importance of your message, a love to precious souls, and a perception of the divine presence--will give your discourses a solidity, a seriousness, a weight, which will impress a sympathetic feeling upon your hearers--and they will listen, as to one who speaks with spirit, demonstration, and power.

Allow me, before I conclude, to caution you against some too *prevalent mistakes* upon this subject. There are methods sometimes used to fix the attention of an audience, it is hoped, with a design to their benefit, which are very different from preaching with power, and seldom produce any lasting effect upon a sensible hearer--but an unfavorable idea of the preacher.

Beware of ***affecting the orator***. I do not advise you to pay no regard to a just and proper elocution; it deserves your attention, and

many a good sermon loses much of the effect it might otherwise produce, by an awkward and uncouth delivery. But let your elocution be *natural*. Despise the little arts by which men of little minds endeavor to set themselves off; they will blast your success, and expose you to contempt. The grand principle of gospel oratory, is *simplicity*. *Affectation* is displeasing in all people--but in none is it so highly disgusting as in a preacher. A studied attitude, a measured motion, a close attention to cadences and pauses, a mimicry of theatrical action, may be passable in the recital of a school lecture--but is hateful in the pulpit. Men never do, never can, speak thus, when they speak from the emotion of their hearts.

How is it possible then for a man who professes to speak for God, who addresses himself to immortal souls, who discourses upon the most important subjects, the love of Christ, the joys of heaven, or the terrors of the Lord; how is it possible for this man to find time or disposition for such *pompous trifling*, if he really understands and believes what he says? The truly pious will weep for his ill-timed vanity. And if any seem pleased, it is chiefly because this manner of preaching seldom disturbs the conscience, for it cannot be expected that God will vouchsafe the testimony of his Spirit, even to his own truths, when the *poor worm* who delivers them, is visibly more solicitous for the *character of an eloquent speaker*, than for the success of his message.

Sometimes ***vociferation*** seems to be considered as a mark of powerful preaching. But I believe a sermon that is loud and noisy from beginning to end, seldom produces much good effect. Here again, my friend, if you are happily possessed of *simplicity*, it will be a good guide. It will help you to adjust your voice to the size of the place or congregation, and then to the variations of your subject. When the *explanation* of the text and the *application* of the sermon

are both in the same boisterous tone, I am led to consider it rather as a proof of the *lack of power*, than otherwise. It seems impossible for a preacher to be equally affected in every part of his discourse, and therefore, if he appears to be so, his exertion, in some parts at least, must be *constrained* and *artificial*, and this thought will often bring a suspicion upon the whole. Especially if his voice is as vehement in *prayer* as in *preaching*. We doubt not--but if he were with the King of England, that a certain composure and modesty of air, would indicate that he considered *whom* he was speaking to, and those who speak to God, would certainly give tokens of a reverence and awe upon their spirits, if they really felt it; very loud speaking is far from being a token of such a frame. At the best, *very loud preaching* is the effect of a bad habit; and though it may be practiced by good men and good preachers, I am persuaded it is neither sign nor cause of the Word being received with *power* by the hearers. People are seldom, if ever, *stunned* into the love of the truth.

There is another strain of preaching, which, though it wears the garb of zeal, is seldom a proof of any power but the power of self. I mean ***angry and scolding preaching***. The gospel is a *benevolent* scheme, and whoever speaks in the power of it, will assuredly speak in love. In the most faithful rebukes of sin, in the most solemn declarations of God's displeasure against it, a preacher may give evidence of a disposition of good-will and compassion to sinners, and assuredly will, if he speaks under the influence of the power of truth. If we can indulge *invective* and *bitterness* in the pulpit, we are but gratifying our own evil tempers, under the pretense of a concern for the cause of God and truth. A preacher of this character, instead of resembling a priest bearing in his censer hallowed fire taken from God's altar, may be compared to the madman described in the Proverbs, who scatters at random firebrands and arrows and death, and says, *Am not I in sport?* Such people may applaud their own

faithfulness and courage, and think it a great attainment that they can so easily and constantly set their congregation at defiance; but they must not expect to be useful, so long as it remains a truth, that the *wrath of man* works not the righteousness of God.

But the limits of a letter constrain me to stop here, only adding my prayers and best wishes for your comfort and success.

I am your sincere friend,

Twenty-One Letters to his Adopted Daughter

(John Newton had no children of his own. These twenty-one letters were written his *adopted daughter Betsy*, when she was away at school.)

Letter 1

September 8, 1779

My dear child,

I was glad of your letter, for we were just thinking of you, as it seems you were of us, that it was a long time since we heard from you. When you want a letter from me, you must write—if I send you one for one, I think it will be pretty well.

Richard died about two weeks ago, and I buried him and three others within a week. All four were rather young people, that is, about thirty years of age. Last Sunday evening I preached a funeral sermon for Richard; the text was Genesis 49:19, "*Gad* will be attacked by marauding bands, but he will attack their heels." That short verse

contained his history; and I hope it contained yours likewise. The first part is sure to you if you live; you will meet with many troops of sins, fears, cares, and troubles, which will fight against you, and seem at times almost to overcome you—yes, overcome you they certainly would, if you were to fight them in your own strength. If you do not seek and love the Lord Jesus, you would be destroyed by them. But I cannot bear to entertain such a thought; surely you must, you will love him!

You hear a great deal of his beauty and goodness; believe it, for it is true; and that a great deal—is but little of what ought to be said of him. But pray him to show himself and his own love to your heart; then you will love him indeed! All the world would love him—did they but rightly know him. Well, if you love the Lord Jesus, you will certainly overcome at last; and then you shall have the crown of life, and all the happiness which is contained in the promises made to those who overcome, in the second and third chapter of Revelation. My dear child, pray to him, and never be content or satisfied until you feel your desire and love fixed upon him. Nothing less will content me for you. If you should behave to me and your mamma with the greatest tenderness, affection, and attention as you grow up, (as I hope you will, and you yourself are sensible you ought,) still I would weep over you, if I saw you negligent and ungrateful towards the Lord. We love you, and would do much to show it—but we could not, we dare not, be *crucified* for you. This was such love as Jesus only could show; judge what a return it calls for from you. Not to love the Lord Jesus—is the height of wickedness and the depth of misery! "If anyone does not love the Lord, that person is cursed!" 1 Corinthians 16:22

Believe me to be yours.

Letter 2

October 22, 1779

My dear child,

You may well expect to hear from me; but you will hardly expect a long letter, if you remember what little leisure time I have in London. Almost every day loads me with debt to you—and brings me letters which I am not able to answer; but my dear *Betsy* is never forgotten. We have been here two weeks; the Lord gave us a pleasant and safe journey. Your mamma has been, upon the whole, comfortably well. I need not tell you that we are situated in the midst of so much noise and smoke. But here I can have no garden; no pretty walks among trees and fields; no birds but such as are prisoners in iron cages, so that I pity them, for all their singing.

But the same sun that shines there, is often to be seen at London; and the Lord Jesus, like the sun, is in all places at once. Go where we will, we are not far from him, if we have but eyes to see him, and hearts to perceive him. My dear child, when you look at the sun, I wish it may lead your thoughts to him who made it, and who placed it in the sky, not only to give us light—but to be the brightest, noblest emblem of himself. There is but one sun, and we need no another—so there is but one Savior; but he is complete and all sufficient, the Sun of Righteousness, the Fountain of life and comfort; his beams, wherever they reach, bring healing, strength, peace, and joy to the soul. Pray to him, my dear, to shine forth, and reveal himself to you. Oh, how different is he from all that you have ever seen with your bodily eyes! he is the Sun of the soul, and he can make you as sensible of His presence—as you are of the sun-shine at noon-day; and, when once you obtain a clear sight of him, a thousand little

things, which have hitherto engaged your attention, will in a manner disappear.

As by the light of opening day,
The stars are all concealed;
So earthly beauties fade away,
When Jesus is revealed.

I entreat, I charge you, to ask him every day to show himself to you. Think of him as being always with you; about your path by day, about your bed by night, nearer to you than any object you can see, though you see him not; whether you are sitting or walking, in company or alone. People often consider God as if he saw them from a great distance—but this is wrong; for, though he is in heaven, the heaven of heavens cannot contain him; he is as much with us as with the angels; in him we live, and move, and have our being; as we live in the air which surrounds us, and is within us, so that it cannot be separated from us a moment. And whatever thoughts you can obtain of God from the Scripture, as great, holy, wise, and good, endeavor to apply them all to Jesus Christ, who once died upon the cross, for he is the true God, and eternal life, with whom you have to do; and, though he is the King of kings, and Lord of lords, and rules over all—he is so condescending and compassionate, that he will hear and answer the prayer of a child. Seek him, and you shall find him; whatever else you seek, you may be disappointed—but he is never sought in vain.

Your very affectionately

Letter 3

April 8, 1780

My dear child,

I have heard of you several times since I received your letter, which I wished to answer before. I would be thankful that you are well, and I hope you are happy, that is, in the common sense of the word; for, strictly speaking, happiness is not to be found here. I hope, however, you are cheerful, thankful, and, in some degree, satisfied with your lot. And, in order to this, I would wish you to look round you, and see how many children are sick, while you are well; poor and destitute, while you are provided, not only with the *necessities*—but the *comforts* of life. How many, again, are exposed to hard and unkind treatment, whereas you are noticed and caressed, and have kind friends abroad and at home. Once more, consider how many are brought up in ignorance and wickedness, have nothing but evil examples, and, it is to be feared, will go from bad to worse as they grow up; while you have the advantage of good education and good examples, and are placed where you can hear the precious gospel, by which the Lord gives faith and salvation to those who seek him.

Then ask yourself *how* it is, or *why* you are better off than they? And I hope there is something within you that will tell you, whatever the reason may be—that it is not because you are better in yourself, or deserve better things than others. Your heart is no better; you likewise are a sinner; you were born with a sinful disposition, and, though you are a child, you have sinned against the Lord; so that, had he been strict to mark what is amiss, he might justly have cut you off long ago. The only reason why you are so favored, must be the Lord's mercy and goodness. He pitied you when you did not know how to pity yourself; and in His providence he removed you from a place where you would probably have remained ignorant of him; and he placed you under our care, and made you dear to us, that we might feel a pleasure in doing everything in our power to

promote your welfare. And I hope that you and we shall have reason to thank him that you came to us.

The days are growing long, the summer is coming, and among the many pleasant days of summer, there is one which I hope will bring you home. I believe you to be glad to come, and we shall be glad to see you—I hope you will like the house. There are green trees in front, and a green field backwards, with cows feeding in it; so that it has some little resemblance of the country.

Your mamma sent you a cake, which I hope you received; and, if you did, I suppose it is all gone by this time—for they say, you cannot eat your cake and have it. It is a true saying, and full of meaning. Look at all that appears good and pleasant in this world; could you call it all your own, it would last but a little while, and when you go into another world, the remembrance of what you had in this world, will be but like remembering you once had a cake—but it is gone, quite eaten up. But it is not so, my dear child, with respect to that feast which *Jesus* prepares for poor sinners. The pleasures which he gives are repeated from time to time, and are pleasing even when we reflect on them. And, in the other world, when earthly pleasures will be quite ended, those who love him shall have pleasure without interruption and without end, rivers of pleasure at his right hand for evermore! May the Lord bless you, and keep you. It is one of my pleasures while here to think of you, to feel for you, and to write to you as

Your affectionate.

Letter 4

August 3, 1780

My dear child,

You may be sure your mamma and I were very glad to hear that the Lord preserved you from harm, and that you were safe and well at _____. I wish you to have a deep impression on your mind, that your *safety*, whether abroad or at home, or the continuance of your *health* from one hour to another, is not a matter of course—but the effect of the care and goodness of him who knows we are as helpless as sheep, and condescends to act the part of a shepherd towards us. May you learn to acknowledge him in all your ways, to pray to him for his blessing, and to praise him daily for his mercies; and then you will do well.

This is a great privilege, which distinguishes us from the beasts of the field—they likewise owe their preservation to his providence; but then they are not capable of *knowing* him or *thanking* him. There are many young people who are contented to live without God in the world; but this is not only their *sin*—but their *shame* likewise. They thereby renounce the chief honor they are capable of, and degrade themselves to a level with the beasts! But let it not be so with you. Pray to the Lord to teach you to love him; and, when you think of him, fix your thoughts upon Jesus Christ, upon him who conversed on earth as a man. The great God has manifested himself in a way suited to us, as weak creatures and poor sinners. God is everywhere present; but only those who look to him in Christ—can love, trust, or serve him aright. When you read our Savior's discourses in Scripture, pay attention as if you saw him with your own eyes standing before you. And when you pray, assure yourself, before you begin, that he is actually in the room with you, and that his ear is open to every word you say. This will make you serious, and it will likewise encourage you, when you consider that you are not speaking into the air, or to one who is a great way off; but to One who is very near you, to your

best Friend, who is both able and willing to give you everything that is good for you.

My advice to you will be chiefly with respect to your religious concerns and your moral conduct. But there are other things belonging to your mamma's province. She wishes, as you grow up, you may not appear to a disadvantage when compared with other young women; and, indeed, if you should be everything she wishes you to be, you will do honor to the school you come from.

I think you are in general willing to oblige her, and I am persuaded a little care and resolution on your part, would soon make it easy and familiar to you to follow the *example* she sets you, as well as the *advice* she gives you. I hope therefore, for her sake, for mine—and especially for your own sake, that you will endeavor to be notable. It was a grief to me that my time was so unavoidably taken up, that I could spare but little to converse with you; but we agreed, you know, to make it up by letters. It is now your turn to write, and I shall be glad of a long letter from you soon, in which I wish you to open your mind, to tell me what you think, feel, hope, fear, or desire, with the same freedom as if you were writing to one of your school-fellows.

The Lord bless you, my dear child, and give you to increase in wisdom and grace, as you increase in years. Always think of me as

Your very affectionate father.

Letter 5

November 1, 1780

My dear child,

I congratulate you that you are now within a month of December,

when you will begin to count the days, and to see the vacation peeping over the head of a short interval. I may congratulate your mamma, and myself likewise, (provided you come to us improved as we wish you,) for we long to see you, and have done so every day since you left us.

Your mamma is often indisposed—but seldom very ill, at least not long together; but both she and I have many feelings with which we were not acquainted when we were young like you. The advantages of youth and health are seldom rightly known at the right time. It is indeed a mercy if, when we are growing old, we have some proper sense of the *folly* and *vanity* we indulged in early life, and can be ashamed as we ought, to think how many opportunities we neglected; how many talents we mis-improved. Yet, repentance cannot *recall* the day which is past. It is my frequent prayer that you may be wiser than I was at your time of life; that you may have grace to remember your Creator and Redeemer while you are yet young. Depend upon it, my dear, whenever you really know the Lord, you will be sorry you did not know him sooner; whenever you experience that pleasure which is only to be found in loving and serving him, you will wish you had loved and served him (if possible) from your very cradle.

I have no news to tell you; but one thing I can assure you, which, though you have often heard, I hope the repetition will be always pleasing to you, I mean, that I am your very affectionate friend, and feel for you as if I was really and truly your father.

Letter 6

January 10, 1781

My dear child,

I tell many of my friends abroad, that my time is so much taken up, they must not expect me to write to them; and yet I have offered to begin a new correspondence with you, though you are in the same house with me. I would have you take notice, and I believe you will, of this, among many other circumstances by which, as occasions offer, I take a pleasure in showing you that I dearly love you, and long to contribute everything in my power to your improvement and to your satisfaction; and I persuade myself of the hope I form of a suitable return of love and attention from you, will not be disappointed. The Lord, in his good providence, gave you to me, as a gift, and committed you to me as a trust; at the same time, he gave me a great love for you; and, whatever we do for those we love, we do with pleasure.

I thank you for your letter of yesterday. It encourages me to hope that the gracious Savior is knocking at the door of your heart. I doubt not but you write what you think and feel—yet there is more meaning in your expressions, than either you or I can fully comprehend. You are, as you say, a sinner—a *young* sinner, and yet a *great* sinner. It is not your case alone, we are all born in sin; but to be sensible that you are a sinner, is a mercy afforded but to few children at your age. May the Lord keep the persuasion alive in your heart. But the word *sinner* includes so much, that a whole long life will hardly suffice to give you a full sense of it. Thus much I hope you know already, that a *sinner* needs a *Savior*; and that Jesus is the Savior of all sinners who seek him. I commend you to him; if he has taught you a little, he will teach you more. Put yourself simply into his hand, and wait patiently his time; he works powerfully—but for the most part gently and gradually. You know the sun does not break out upon us all at once in the dark night; there is first a glimmering dawn in the sky, which gives us notice that he is coming, and prepares us for his appearance.

By degrees that faint light grows brighter; we see clearer and further; it becomes broad day, and after that the sun rises.

Your part is to pray to him, to hear his Word, and to listen with attention when you hear it preached. I trust you will find your light increase, and your difficulties abate—I wish you to be as cheerful as possible. Cheerfulness is no sin, nor is there any grace in a sullen countenance. On the other hand, I would not have you light or giddy with levity; it will hurt your own spirit, and hinder you from the pursuit of what, in your serious moments, you most desire. I know your natural spirits are changeable; sometimes they are highly volatile—I would have you correct them by thinking you are a sinner. Sometimes you are grave enough; but, if you feel uneasy, then try to think what a Savior you read of. Be sure you do not indulge a hard thought of him, as though he were severe, and stern, and ready to harm you. Form your ideas of him from the accounts the evangelists give you, that he was meek and lowly when upon earth, full of compassion and gentleness, ready to pity, to heal, to help, and to teach all who come to him; and they will tell you that he had in particular a great love for children. He tells you so himself. You read how he took them in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them. When you think of this, shake off gloomy thoughts, speak to him in your heart, and say, *Lord, bless me too!*

One of the best methods of keeping free from uneasy, troublesome thoughts, at least of lessening them, is to be always employed. Strive and pray against indolence, look upon it as a hurtful, yes, a sinful thing. Read in English and French, write and work. Your mamma and I will be both willing you should diversify these employment's as may be most agreeable to your own inclination; but we wish not to see you idle. Now is the time of life for you to acquire useful knowledge, that you may make yourself agreeable, and that you may

be useful and qualified to fill up that station in the world which the Lord may allot you. I will gladly assist you as much as I can, in what falls under my department; but you know I have but little time. God has given you a good capacity, and therefore the less assistance will be necessary, if you are not lacking to yourself.

You may depend on our doing what we can to make you happy. If we seem to cross your wishes sometimes, or not to comply with your desire—you may be sure we have some reason for it. You shall go out with us, as often as we think it will be proper and right; and we shall not leave you at home for our own pleasure—but because it would not be good for you to be too much abroad. We expect and hope you will be ruled by a *hint* or a *word*; and then you will find us studious in contriving how to make everything as agreeable as possible to you. Because you desired a letter soon, I have written thus much, although I had other things to do, and it is preaching morning. I shall hope for a letter from you very much. May the Lord bless you.

I am, my dear child, your affectionate father.

Letter 7

October 17, 1781

My dear child,

I send you the *first* letter—in the future you must not expect me to write but in answer to yours. We wish to hear soon that you are well, and that you like your situation. I do not wish you to like any place so well as home—on one account you ought not; for it is impossible any people should ever love you so well as your mamma and I do; and therefore you are bound to love us dearly, and that will make you love home; and the more you love home, the more diligent you will be in the improvement of your time at school. For your return to us

must, in a great measure, depend upon yourself; it is no pleasure to us to send you abroad. I thought for a day or two the house looked awkward without you, and I miss you a little every day still; but we are forced to part with you for your own good.

I cannot bear the thoughts of your growing up like a tall weed; I want you to appear like a pretty flower; and it is observable that the best of flowers in a garden would in time degenerate into tawdry weeds if they were not cultivated—such is the importance of education to children. The Lord has been good to you; he has given you good understanding and natural abilities—and much that is engaging in your disposition. It would be a great pity that, with all these advantages, you should prove only a weed. To prevent it, I was obliged to transplant you from London to H____, where I hope you will thrive and flourish, increasing in wisdom and favor as you increase in stature.

I have written you many letters in a religious strain, which I hope you have preserved, and will now and then read them over, the more willingly perhaps, because your papa wrote them. I would not overdo you upon this subject; though the truth is, this is my chief desire for you, that you may know the Lord and love him; if not, though you were accomplished and admired beyond any of your age, and though you could live in all the splendor of a queen, I would weep over you! I would lament your birth, and the day when you first came under my care. But I know that I cannot make you truly pious, nor can you make yourself so. It is the Lord's work, and I am daily praying him to bless you indeed. But he has a time; until then, I hope you will wait upon him according to your light, in the use of his appointed means, that you will make conscience of praying to him, and reading his Word, and hearing when you have opportunity. I hope he will enable you to behave obediently and affectionately to your governess, and in

a kind manner to all around you, so as to gain their love and esteem. I hope you will likewise carefully abstain from whatever you know to be wrong, thus far I may hope you can go at present; but I do not wish you to affect more of piety in your appearance, than you are really conscious of. There is some danger of this in a family where a religious profession is befriended. Young people are apt to imitate those about them, and sometimes (which is abominable) to put on a *show of religion* in order to please, though their hearts have no concern in it. I have a good hope that the Lord will teach you, and guide you, and that the many prayers and praises I have offered on your behalf will not be lost.

When I began my letter, I did not mean to write half so seriously, I rather thought to find something to divert you; but you are very near my heart, and this makes me serious. I long to come and see you; but it cannot be yet, nor can I say when—but I shall bounce in upon you some day when perhaps you are not thinking of me.

I am, my dear, your very affectionate.

Letter 8

November 10, 1781

My dear child,

When your mamma and I come to see you, it must be on a Monday, for more reasons than one; which it is not necessary for you to know—and, as there is but one Monday in a week, something or other may prevent oftener than I wish. However, I promise to think of you when I cannot see you. Sometimes we talk of you. "Christmas will soon be here; then we shall have her at home, and then who knows but she will be so improved, and behave so nicely, that we shall be sorry to

part with her again." When we talk thus, I hope you will make good what we say.

Lately, for about a week, I was attacked by a company of pains. Some seized my face and teeth, some took possession of my back, and some got into my sides; but they are all gone now, and they did me no harm. You know little about *pains* and *cares* yet. You are now at the time of life when you are especially called upon to remember your Creator and Redeemer, and have the greatest advantages for doing it. But, if your life is spared, to you likewise the days will come when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them." But I hope long before they come, you will have some experience of pleasures which do not at all depend upon youth or health, or anything that this world can either give or take away. Seek the Lord, and you shall live; and you have not far to seek for him—he is very near you; he is all around you; about your bed by night, and your path by day. He sees, he notices all you say and do. But I do not wish you to conceive of him so as to make the thought of him uneasy to you. Think of him according to the account the evangelists give of him when he was upon earth; how gracious, compassionate, and kind he was.

If he were upon earth now, would you not wish that I should lead you to him, that he might lay his hands upon you and bless you, as he did the children which were brought to him? If he were here, and I could go with you and say, "Lord, bless *my* child likewise!" I am sure he would not frown at you and say, "Take her away, I will have nothing to do with her." No, my dear child, he has promised, them that come to him he will never cast out. Go to him yourself; though you cannot see him, it is sufficient that he sees and hears you. Tell him, that you hear and believe he is a Savior to many, and beg him to be your Savior too. Tell him it was not your own choice—but his providence, that removed you from C____, and put you under my care, which

gave you an opportunity of knowing more of his goodness than you would otherwise have done; and beg of him to give you his grace, that the advantages you have had may not aggravate your sins—but lead you to his salvation; and do not let a day pass without thinking on his sufferings in Gethsemane, and on Mount Golgotha. Surely his love to poor sinners, in bleeding and dying for them, will constrain you to love him in return; and, if once you love him, then everything will be easy, and you will account it your greatest pleasure to please him.

I thank you for your letter. I conceive a hope from it, that you will improve in your writing. I wish you not only to write a good hand—but a good letter; and the whole art is to write with freedom and ease. When you take your pen in hand, pop things down just as they come to your mind; just as you would speak of them without study. Tell me something about the fowls in the yard, or the trees in the garden, or what you please, only write freely. May the Lord bless you, I love you dearly, and wish you to believe me to be

Your affectionate father

Letter 9

My dear child,

Mrs. ____ died on recently, and was buried yesterday. I had often visited her during her illness, and was at her funeral. She was well a few months ago—but a consumption soon brought her down to the grave. But, though she was young, she was not sorry to leave such a poor world as this. I always found her happy and cheerful, though her illness was very painful. She suffered much by cold sweats; but she said, a few days before her death, that it would be worth laying a thousand years in a cold sweat, for one hour's such happiness as she

then felt. "Oh," she said, "if this is dying, what a pleasant thing dying is!"

I think my dear child has told me, that you are often terrified at the thoughts of death. Now, if you seek the Lord, as Mrs. ____ did, while you are young, then, whenever you come to die, you will find that death has nothing terrible in it to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. He has disarmed death, and taken away its sting; and he has promised to meet his people and receive them to himself, when they are about to leave this world, and everything they loved in it, behind them. You have the same advantages that Mrs. ____ had; like her you are placed under the care of those who wish well to your soul; the Scriptures, which made her wise to salvation, are put into your hand likewise, and you also have the opportunity of hearing the gospel. She was exhorted and encouraged from a child, to pray to the Lord for his grace—and so are you. I hope you will do as she did; and the Lord who was gracious to her, will be gracious to you; for he has promised that none who seek him, shall seek him in vain.

Your conscience tells you that you are a sinner—and that makes you afraid. But, when the Lord gives you faith, you will see and understand, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Then you will love him; and, when you love him, you will find it easy and pleasant to serve him; and then you will long to see him who died for you! And, as it is impossible to see him in this world—you will be glad that you are not to stay here always; you will be willing to die, that you may be with him where he is.

In the mean time, I hope you will pray to him, and wait for His time to reveal himself to you; endeavoring to avoid whatever you know to be wrong and displeasing to him; and sometimes, I hope, you will feel your heart soft and tender, and serious thoughts and desires

rising in your mind; when you do, then think, "Now is the Lord calling me!" And say as Samuel did, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." He does not call with all audible voice—but he speaks to the heart in a way not to be described by words. When we are grieved and ashamed for our sins; when we are sincerely affected with what we read and hear of him, of his love, his sufferings, and His death; when we see and feel that nothing but his favor can make us happy—then we may be sure the Lord is near.

I believe you have too much sense and honesty to make a *profession* of religion, further than your *heart* is really engaged, in order to please your fellow-creatures. But, on the other hand, I would not have you backward to open your mind to me on religious subjects. I know you are not without convictions, and though all convictions are not right—yet true religion always begins with convictions. We must know we are sick, before we can prize a physician. If I live to see you a partaker of the grace of God, one of the chief desires of my heart will be gratified; this would please me more than to have your weight in gold, and therefore you may be sure I often pray for you.

I am your affectionate father.

Letter 10

August 1, 1782

My dear child,

Do not think we forget you; our love would reach you were you a hundred times further from us than you presently are; but we are very much taken up. Monday your mamma was ill in bed all day; she is pretty well now—but P ____ is very bad indeed—worse I believe than ever you saw her, and we can hardly attend to anything but her. Then again poor Mr. B ____ was hurt by a mad ox, about ten days

since; his life has been in great danger—but now we hope he will recover. I visit him every day, and that takes up a good deal of my time.

I am thankful that the Lord preserves you in health and safety. I hope you are thankful too. When you see anybody sick, or hurt or lame—I would have you think it is of the Lord's goodness, that their case is not yours.

Sin has filled the world with sorrow; all the calamities you read or hear of, or see with your eyes—are the fruits of sin! And, as you are a sinner, you might suffer what others do! It is only the Lord's mercy that preserves you, and provides you good things which many others have not.

You know many children are brought up in poverty, meet with evil treatment, and have no parents or kind friends to take care of them. But, though the Lord removed your parents before you were old enough to miss them—He took care to provide you a home with us; He inclined us not only to receive you—but to love you; and now your needs are all supplied. And, besides this, you have been and are instructed and prayed for every day. You have great reason to be thankful indeed, and I hope you will pray to the Lord to give you a thankful heart—for you cannot have it—unless He gives it to you. I hope you will say from your heart—

Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God has given me more.

Oh, it is a great blessing to be sensible that we deserve nothing from God but eternal misery—and that all the good we receive is from His wondrous mercy, and then to know that all this mercy we owe to the Lord Jesus, who died for us, that we might live and be happy.

There's never a gift his hand bestows,
But cost his heart a groan.

When you understand this, you will love him, and then you will be happy indeed; then it will be your pleasure to please him, and then, putting your trust in him, you will be preserved from anxiety and evil.

Your affectionate father

Letter 11

August 10, 1783

My dear Betsy,

How vain are all things here below! "Vanity of vanities!" says the preacher. And you, and I, and your mamma, may say so likewise; for we all counted upon seeing you last Sunday. We listened at the door—and peeped out of the window—but no Betsy came! Now we will venture to expect you next Sunday.

Indeed, it is not amiss that you should now and then meet with a hindrance—that you may learn, if possible—not to count too much on what tomorrow may do for you—and that you may begin to feel the impossibility of being happy, any further than your will is brought into submission to the will of God. In order to learn this—you must have your own will frequently crossed. And things do and will turn out, almost daily in one way or other—contrary to our wishes and expectations.

When such disappointments happen—most people fret and fume! They are angry and impatient! But others, who are in the Lord's school, and desirous of being taught by Him—get benefit by these

things, and sometimes find more pleasure in yielding to His appointments, though contrary to their own wills—than they would have done, if all had happened just as they had desired!

I wish for you my dear child, to think much of the Lord's governing providence. It extends to the minutest concerns. He rules and manages all things; but in so secret a way, that most people think that He does nothing. When, in reality—He does ALL!

He appointed the time of your coming into the world. And the day and hour of your coming home from school to us—totally depends upon Him likewise! Nor can you safely travel one step of the road—without His protection and care over you!

It may now seem a small matter to you and I, whether you came home last Sunday—or are to come home next Sunday. But we know not what different consequences may depend upon the day—we know not what hidden danger you might have escaped by staying at school last Sunday. The Lord knows all things! He foresees every possible consequence! Often what we call disappointments, are really mercies from Him to save us from harm!

If I could teach you a lesson, which, as yet, I have but poorly learned myself—I would teach you a way to be never be disappointed. This would be the case—if you could always form a right judgment of this world, and all things in it.

If you go to a bramble-bush to look for grapes—you must be disappointed; but then you are old enough to know that grapes never grow upon brambles. So, if you expect much pleasure here in this world—you will not find it. But you ought not to say you are disappointed, because the Scripture plainly warned you beforehand,

to look for crosses, trials and hindrances, every day. If you expect such things—you will not be disappointed when they happen!

"The LORD does whatever pleases Him—in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths!" Psalm 135:6. "At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: Naked I came from my mother's womb—and naked I will depart. The Lord gave—and the Lord has taken away! May the name of the Lord be praised!" Job 1:20-21

Letter 12

October 15, 1782

]My dear child,

It is rather to your disadvantage that I have lately corrected a mistake I had made. I thought you were but twelve years old last birthday; but I read in a blank leaf of the great Bible, that my child was born June 22, 1769; consequently you are now in your *fourteenth* year. Therefore, to keep pace with my ideas and wishes, you ought to be a whole year more advanced in improvements of every kind than you are, a whole year wiser. Some things which I might think very tolerable in my child, supposing she was but twelve years old, will seem but rather so, when I know she is thirteen; and some things of another sort will be quite unsuitable at the age of thirteen, which might be more excusable if you were but twelve. You see, my dear child, you must use double diligence to fetch up this year, which we have somehow lost out of the account. You have a year less for improvement, and are a year nearer to the time in which you will begin to appear like a young woman than I expected. I know not but I should have been pleased to find that I had made a mistake

on the other side, and that you were a year younger than I had supposed you.

As it is, I shall hope the best—I do not complain of you. As I love you dearly, so I have much comfort in you—and I trust you will pray to the Lord for yourself, as I do for you, that he may give you his grace, and wisdom, and blessing—then I know you will do well. But sometimes, when I consider what a world you are growing up into, and what snares and dangers young people are exposed to, with little experience to help them, I have some painful feelings for you.

The other day I was at the harbor, and saw a ship launched—she slipped easily into the water; the people on board shouted; the ship looked clean and mirthful, she was freshly painted, and her colors flying. But I looked at her with a sort of pity, "Poor ship!" I thought, "you are now in port and in safety; but before long you must go to sea. Who can tell what *storms* you may meet with hereafter, and to what hazards you may be exposed; how weather-beaten you may be before you return to port again, or perhaps you may return at all!" Then my thoughts turned from the ship to my dear child. It seemed to be an emblem of your present state—you are now, as it were, in a safe harbor; but by and by you must launch out into the *world*, which may well be compared to a tempestuous sea. I could even now almost weep at the resemblance. But I take courage, as my hopes are greater than my fears. I know there is an infallible Pilot, who has the winds and the waves at his command. There is hardly a day passes, in which I do not entreat him to take charge of you. Under his care I know you will be safe. He can guide you, unhurt, amidst the storms, and rocks, and dangers, by which you might otherwise suffer—and bring you, at last, to the haven of eternal rest!

"He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm!" Luke 8:24

"Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water—and they obey Him!" Luke 8:25

I hope you will seek him while you are young, and I am sure he will be the friend of all whom seek him sincerely; then you will be happy, and I shall rejoice. Nothing will satisfy me but this; though I should live to see you settled to the greatest advantage in temporal matters, except you love him, and live in his fear and favor, you would appear to me quite miserable. I think it would go near to break my heart; for, next to your dear mamma, there is nothing so dear to me in this world as you. But the Lord gave you to me, and I have given you to him again, many and many a time upon my knees, and therefore I hope you must, and will, and shall be his.

I hardly know any accomplishment I more wish you to attain, than a talent of writing free and easy letters—and I am ready to think, if you could freely open your mind to me, you might inform me of something I would be glad to know, or you might propose to me some things which now and then trouble your thoughts, and thereby give me an opportunity of attempting to relieve, encourage, or direct you. For these reasons, I have requested of your governess to permit you now and then to seal up your letters to me and your mamma without showing them to her. I have asked this liberty for you only when you write to us; nor even then always—but at such times as you find yourself disposed to write more freely than you could do if your letters were to be seen before you send them. I have likewise told her, that I would desire you to be as careful in writing as if she was to see your letters, and not send us *pot-hooks and hangers*, as they say, because you know she will not inspect your writing. Under these

restrictions she has promised to oblige me; and I take it as a favor, for I am well aware that, in general, it is by no means proper that young people at school should write letters from thence without the knowledge of their governess. But yours has so good an opinion of you and of I, that she is willing to trust us, and I hope we shall neither of us make an improper use of her indulgence.

I am, with great tenderness, my dear child, your very affectionate father

Letter 13

January 27, 1783

My dear child,

Lack of leisure *time*, and not lack of *inclination*, prevented my writing; and I now take the first opportunity that has offered since you went from us. If I had no more correspondents than you have, you would hear from me very often; nor can I expect to hear from you so often as I wish, because I consider that you likewise have your engagements; and though, perhaps, I am not willing to allow that your business is so important as some of mine, it must, and ought, for the present, to take up a good deal of your time. You have not only reading, and writing, and arithmetic to mind—but you work sprigs and flowers, and maps, and cut bits of paper to pieces, and learn a strange language, so that you are very busy to be sure; for *idleness* and *sauntering* are very great evils, and doors by which a thousand temptations and mischiefs may enter.

Your mamma and I are very well pleased with you, on the whole; your affection is not lost upon us; we think we can perceive an improvement in you, and we believe the things in which you yet fail, proceed rather from *inattention* than from the lack of a desire to

please us; and we have a good hope that, as you grow older, you will outgrow that heedlessness which you sometimes discover. You are not yet a woman—but neither are you a child; you are almost fourteen, and at that age a certain degree of *thought* and *foresight* may be hoped for, which it would have been unreasonable to expect from you some few years ago. It has pleased God to give you a capacity for improvement; and, as you see we are so situated, that neither your mamma nor I can bestow that time and attention upon you, when you are at home, which we would wish—that I hope you will make the best use you possibly can of the opportunities you have at school. It is no pleasure to us, that you should live so far from us, for we love you dearly, and love your company; but it is what we submit to, for your education.

You desired me to send you news, when I should write; but I have little to tell you. The public news you will hear, I suppose, from twenty people—it is very important. The Lord is about to give us the blessing of ***peace***. Neither you nor I can tell the value of this blessing, because we have not known the lack of it. It is true, we have heard much talk of *war*, and we have heard of the calamities which war has occasioned; but we have heard of them as things which have *happened at a distance*—had we lived in America we would probably have *seen* and *felt* them! We would have seen towns, villages, and houses in flames! We would have heard the groans of widows and orphans around us! We would have had everything we call our own—torn from us, and perhaps have been glad to hide ourselves in the woods to save ourselves! Such has been the lot of thousands in the course of the war. If you remember the chaos, confusion, and terror, which prevailed at the time of the riots, it may give you some apprehension of the case of those who live in a country which is the seat of war. Our apprehensions were over in a few days; but they live in such alarms, or greater, from the beginning to the end of the year.

I hope, therefore, you will be thankful to God, if he is pleased to sheath the *sword of war*, and to put a stop to the devastations and the slaughters which have so long prevailed. Though you yourself have not been a sufferer, I wish you to cultivate a *sympathetic* and *benevolent* spirit, a disposition to *compassionate*, if you cannot *relieve*—the distresses of others. This, next to the grace of God, is the brightest ornament of human nature; or rather, when genuine, it is one of the best *effects* and *proofs* of grace. It was the mind of Jesus the Savior—and those who love him, will in a degree resemble him, and they only. A hard-hearted, unfeeling, selfish Christian is a total contradiction!

When you think what multitudes of mankind are suffering by war, famine, sickness, storms, earthquakes, and other calamities, let it lead your thoughts to the evil of sin, which brought all these other evils into the world. But what is sin? I endeavored to tell you last Sunday, from Jer. 2:11. Sin is presuming to do our own will—in opposition to the will of God, who is our Creator, Lawgiver, and Benefactor. By sin we attempt independence from our Creator, affront the authority of our righteous Lawgiver, and are guilty of base and horrid ingratitude against our greatest and kindest Benefactor!

If you could form a 'little creature' and make it live—and if it hated you and opposed you, slighted your kindness, and took a pleasure in displeasing you—would you not soon be weary of it, and, instead of feeding and taking care of it, be provoked to tread it under your feet? But, oh, the patience of God—though He could destroy rebellious men much more easily than you could kill a loathsome spider—yet He waits to be gracious, and has so loved them as to send his own Son to die—that they may live!

Sin has not only filled the world with woe—but it was the cause of all the woe that Jesus endured. He groaned and wept, and sweat blood, and died upon the cross—only because we had sinned! May I live to see you duly affected with the evil of sin—and the love of Jesus! There is nothing more that I desire for you!

I am, my dear child, your most affectionate father

Letter 14

March 8, 1783

My dear child,

It would please me if I could either visit you or write to you, or both every week. But it cannot be; I am behind-hand with everybody. Yet I think I send you six letters—for your one letter. You stare at that; but if you please count the *lines* in one of your epistles, and the letters in every line, and then compare it with one of mine—you will find that *you* receive many more words and letters than you return!

You say that you are afraid of death—and I do not wonder why. For you are a lost sinner! But I hope to see you a believer, and then you will not greatly fear death, while it is at a distance; and, whenever it comes very near, you will not fear it at all. Mr. ____ is gone, and so is Mr. ____ , and neither of them was more afraid of death than you would be afraid to board a coach that stopped at your gate to take you home to us. Jesus died to make death *safe* and *comfortable* to us. Balaam was an evil man— but he spoke well when he said, "*Let me die the death of the righteous!*" Make that prayer for yourself; it is a good one, though short. Entreat the Lord to number you among the righteous, that you may *live* their life; then your *death* will be like theirs.

The Scripture in many places speaks of the righteous and the wicked, as the only two classes of people—which divide and comprehend all mankind. And yet it tells us that there is none righteous, no not one! That is, there are none righteous by nature—sinners are made righteous by the grace of God. The grace of God teaches them to understand what they read in Scripture, of the Savior, and of their own need of a Savior. When they put their trust in him, their sins are forgiven them for his sake; and, when they rightly consider his *love* to them, and his *dying* for their sakes—they learn to love him in return.

All who love him, must and will hate what is evil. They learn to resemble him, and study to please him; and thus they are not only accepted as righteous in the Beloved—but they are really made so; the love of righteousness is implanted in their hearts; they believe what the Lord says, they heartily strive to obey his commands, to avoid what he forbids; they place their happiness in his favor, and in doing his will. They cannot but speak of their Savior, and what he has done for them; they love to hear others speak of him, and they love to hear those ministers who preach much concerning him.

But their religion does not all consist in *talking* and *hearing*; they are upright, gentle and loving; they imitate him who went about doing good. The evil tempers of self-will, impatience, pride, envy, anger, and malice, are fought against; they cannot allow themselves in such things; if they feel the rising of such things in their hearts, they are grieved and ashamed, and are glad to fly to the throne of grace for mercy and help against them. On the other hand, they no longer seek pleasure in the *vanities and follies of the world*—they have better things to mind. These *trifles* they lay aside; as we forsake, when we grow up, the play-things which pleased us while we were children.

But you must not expect all this at once. Look at a great tree—an oak, for instance. How tall it is! how wide its branches spread! and if you were to dig, you would find it has deep and wide-spreading *roots* in proportion! Yet this great tree sprang from a little acorn; but not like a mushroom, in a single night—it has been years in growing! And had you watched it every day, you would hardly have perceived that it grew at all. May I not hope that there is at least a little seed of a gracious desire already put in your heart? If so, may the Lord, who alone could *plant* it, *water* it with his blessing, and cause it to increase! If not, it is my daily prayer, that it may be so; and I hope it is your prayer for yourself. I pray that you may live and die with the righteous—it is said of them, They have hope in their death; and that, when they see him approach, they shall say, "Oh, death! where is your sting?"

Your mamma and I love you dearly, and hope we shall always have reason to love you more and more.

I am your affectionate father

Letter 15

May 12, 1783

My dear Betsy,

I have just now received your short and sweet letter; and, having nothing to prevent me, I begin my answer to it immediately.

The snow does not often cover the ground in the neighborhood of London so late as the 8th of May; but it has been so sometimes. One reason you were surprised at the sight is, because you are young, and this is the first instance, perhaps, in the few years you have been able to take notice. You will meet with many other things as you grow up,

which will surprise you for the like reason; for lack of experience, you will not expect them. We expect flowers on the ground in May, and not snow—so those pleasures, the prospects of which present themselves to your mind, and appear at a distance as beautiful as we usually conceive a May morning to be, when we talk of it in winter, will not always answer expectation. When the time comes, something which you did not think of, unseasonable as snow in May, will come with it, and you will be surprised and disappointed; especially at first, and until you are used to these changes. By the time you are as old as I am now, you will not wonder so much; and I hope, long before that, the Lord will teach you to profit by such things.

It is necessary that we should find all to be uncertain and unsatisfying in the present world, or we would be contented with it, and not think of the eternal world. One reason why young people are but seldom serious is, because the world appears so pleasing and so promising. They expect roses without thorns, and May without snow. The Lord make you wise early, that you may remember and seek him now in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, (for come they will,) when you will find no pleasure in them.

Such days have come very early to Miss B ____ . I wish, if it were practicable, that all the misses in all the schools in London could see her. What are the pleasure and gaiety which the most are thinking of, now to her, shut up as she is, in the bloom of life, unable to move herself, and with pain her constant companion day and night! I have been much affected with looking at her; but I believe I shall not see her long. Within these three days she has been much worse. I was with her twice yesterday; and I have been with her again this morning. The doctors think she cannot live many days; and she thinks so too. I am glad to find that she is not unwilling to die. If her affliction has been sanctified to lead her heart to the Lord, then,

instead of greatly *pitying* her—we shall *rejoice* in her behalf. It is better to be sick or lame, or full of pain, and seeking after him—than to live what is commonly deemed a *happy life*, without God in the world.

Cannot you contrive to put your lines in a little closer together? Your paper looks like a half-furnished room. I want a good long letter; I care not what it is about—just so that you write easily. You read sometimes; cannot you find something in your books to tell me of? You walk sometimes, and without doubt look about you. Take notice of anything that strikes your eye; make some reflection or observation upon it, and then put up your thoughts very safely in a corner of your memory, that you may send them to me the next time you write. I love a long letter, especially from you, because I love you a great deal.

Adieu! *May the Lord bless you*, is the prayer of your affectionate father

Letter 16

May 19, 1783

My dear child,

If you drop a tear or two when you are informed that your aunt C _____ is removed from this world of sin and sorrow—I have no objection; but I do not wish you to shed many, nor is there just cause for it. If we could see her now, she would surely say, "*Weep not for me—I am fully happy!*" Yes, she knew and loved the Lord; she lived in his faith and godly fear, and died in his peace and favor; and now she is before the glorious throne! She had her share of trials in this life—but they are all over now—she fought the good fight—and the

Lord made her more than conqueror. Now she has received the conqueror's crown, and is singing the conqueror's song.

Methinks, as dearly as I love you, I could bear to part with you likewise—if I was sure that the Lord had set his seal of love upon your heart, and thereby marked you for his own. If he has not done this already, I hope he will. If he has not yet taken full possession of your heart, I hope you are sensible that he is standing, as it were, at the door, and knocking, waiting to be gracious to you. The door of the heart is not easily opened. The love of *sin*, of *self*, and the *world*, are so many bolts, which are too strong for us to remove by our own power. Yet he can open it easily, (because all things are easy to him,) and, by a sweet constraint of love, force himself an entrance. I hope you are willing that he should do this; and that you are not willing to do anything on your part that may grieve him, and cause him to withdraw and leave you to yourself. You cannot do much—you can, indeed, do nothing spiritually of yourself. Yet there is something for you to do; you are to wait, and pray, and long for his blessing. You are to read his Word, and to endeavor to make it the rule of your conduct, so far as you understand it. You are to attend to his voice in your conscience, and not willfully allow yourself in what you know to be wrong. This is the path in which my heart's desire and prayer is that you may walk at present; and then in due time the promise shall be fulfilled to you which says, "Then shall you know—if you follow on to know the Lord!" Hos. 6:3.

We had some weeping at home upon this occasion. But the Lord is very good. Your mamma has been supported, and is pretty well.

I long to see you, and especially now, that we may read Mr. Gray's Elegy together. I hope we shall be permitted to be with you on the famous exhibition day, and I please myself with the thought, that you

will appear to advantage. I wish for your own sake, that you could get the better of that trepidation which discomposes you when the eyes of company are upon you. But it is a fault on the right side, and much better than a bold, pert, self-confident carriage, which is very disgusting in some young people; but there is a medium which I wish you to aim at.

I am your affectionate father

Letter 17

June 11, 1783

My dear child,

I thank you for your last letter, which pleased me and your mamma very much. We thought it well written, and well expressed. Take as much care as you please, *how* you write; and use as little study as you please, *what* to write. When you are surrounded with the beauties of nature, you need not puzzle yourself with thinking what to say first; but set down first what first occurs to your mind—when you have written that, something else will offer. Try to write just what you think, and write as often and as largely as your many important businesses will allow; for nothing but practice will give you a habit of writing easily—and practice will do it. We could fill up as large a sheet as you, with repeating how much we love you; I hope and believe there is no love lost on either side. Love will make you desirous to please and oblige us, and love will prompt us to do everything in our power to oblige and please you; and so I hope we shall go on loving and pleasing as long as we live.

We often think of Monday night, when we hope to come and see your exhibition. I would like to come over and read the Elegy with you once more; but I know I shall not be able, and I believe it will not be

necessary. I doubt not but you will do it very well, especially if you can get the better of your fear and trepidation. But I had much rather see you a little timid, than see you assuming and affected, as some young people are. I could wish you to have just so much feeling when you begin, as might intimate a respect for the company; and then that you should enter into the spirit of the poem, so as in a manner to forget everybody present, until you have finished. There is a great beauty in the cadence and melody of the verse, if you can hit it off without over-doing it. If you understand and can feel the subject—you will express it properly.

I hope the Elegy will likewise lead you to some profitable reflections for your own use, and which may excite your thankfulness to the Lord. To him you owe your *capacity*, and to him likewise you are indebted for the advantages you have of *cultivation*. It is possible, that among the children we meet half naked in the streets, there may be some who might have been amiable and admired in life, if they had been favored with the helps which the good providence of God has afforded you. But they grew up, poor things, in ignorance and wickedness, after the example of those among whom they live. And though you would not have been like these—yet it is probable you would not have been, as you now may, and I hope will be, if the Lord had not sent you to us. Though you were deprived of your own parents when you were very young, perhaps no child, in such a case, has had less cause to feel the loss; because the Lord not only made us willing to take care of you—but gave us, immediately on our receiving you, a tender affection for you, as if you had been our own child; and from that time your welfare has been a very principal object with us. You have been guarded against the *follies* and *vanities* which might otherwise have taken an early possession of your mind; and you have been acquainted with the means of grace, and the blessed gospel. I trust the Lord has a gracious design to lead you to himself, by all

these favorable circumstances in which he has placed you; for, without this, everything you can learn or attain, would be but of little worth. I wish, indeed, to see you possessed of every accomplishment you can acquire at school; but nothing will satisfy me for you, but the saving grace of God.

I am your very affectionate father

Letter 18

July 29, 1783

My dear Betsy,

You seem to take it for granted, that I must always write first; and you see I very readily submit, in hopes that when your great and many important businesses will permit, you will at least oblige me with an answer—for it will give your mamma and me, and your cousin, pleasure to know that you are well.

While you were a little girl, we used to place you with your back against the wall, by the fire-place in the parlor, and compare you with your former marks, that we might notice how much taller you grew from one half year to another. According to present appearances, you are likely to be sufficiently tall, and to shoot up apace. I need not measure, for I can perceive by a glance of the eye, that you are grown every time you return to us.

But I am watching your growth in another sense with more attention—I wish I could say with more satisfaction. I wish to see you outgrow a certain *childishness*, which once looked very pretty in you—but is by no means so pleasing in a person of your years, and of your size; I think I may add, of your sense too, for I know the Lord has given you a good measure of understanding and natural abilities; so that with a

proper degree of attention and application, you are very capable of attainment suitable to your gender, and your situation in life. I love to call you my *dear child*, and shall probably call you so as long as I live, because there is something to me in the sound of the word *child*, expressive of the tenderness and affection I feel for you; but I would not always have you a child in the common sense of the word. I hope you will not think I am angry with you, and I hope you will not be angry with me, for giving you this hint.

I love to see you cheerful, and a little occasional volatility in a young person favored with health and full of spirits, is very tolerable; but then I would have you remember, that it is high time that a measure of thought, and steadiness, and attention, should begin to mark your general deportment. Your dear mamma, at your age, was capable of superintending the affairs of the family, and was actually called to it; and you are now old enough, if you will do yourself justice, to take a great deal of care off from her hands when you are at home; you have it in your own power to shorten the term of your living away from us. I am glad that though you like your school very well—yet you like your home better; and I am sure we shall be glad when we can think it no longer necessary to keep you abroad, for we love your company, and it is principally for your own sake that we are constrained to part with you. But they say, a word to the wise is enough, and therefore I shall add no more in this strain.

You heard several of my sermons on Mary and Martha. Last Sunday night, I finished the subject by speaking on "*Only one thing is needful!*" This is a sentence which I pray the Lord to write upon your heart. Many things are necessary in their places; but one thing is absolutely needful. It is right that you should be diligent at school, obedient and obliging to your governess and teachers, and endeavor, by a kind and gentle behavior, to gain the esteem of your school-

fellows and of the whole family—a regard to the *one thing needful* is very consistent with all this. But though you were beloved by everybody that knows you—you cannot be happy except you know and love the Lord.

The *one thing needful*, therefore, is to seek him, and his favor, which is better than life; and if you seek him, he will be found by you. You are a sinner, and need forgiveness. You have many needs, which he alone can supply;. You are growing up in a world which is full of sins, snares, troubles, and dangers. Will you not cry to him then, "My Father, you are the Guide of my youth!" You have encouragement to seek him, for he himself both invites and commands you to do it; and if obligations and gratitude can prevail, there is no friend like him, whose mercies are new every morning, and who died upon the cross to redeem us from misery. I commend you to his blessing.

Your cousin is much as she was; she sends her love to you. I believe she loves you dearly, and I believe you love her. I hope you will both love each other as long as you live upon this earth; and that afterwards you will meet in the kingdom of love, and be happy together in heaven forever. Mamma sends her best love. I am often thinking of you, and praying for you, and always desirous to show my love in deed and in truth.

Your affectionate father

Letter 19

October 16, 1783

My dear child,

I hope you will now be able to rest yourself; for you have had a very busy time since mid-summer. So much visiting and running about

has, I hope, given you a right relish for the retirement and regularity of school. What a pretty place you are in, and what a pretty time of life it is with you, if you can but think so, before trouble and care have received commission to disturb you.

I could wish that all my letters might afford you both pleasure and profit—I would make you smile sometimes, and always endeavor to do you good. At present I must write a little upon the subject of *temper*. I do not think your temper a bad one. Your mamma and I are always ready to give you a good character, and it pleases us that we can say that you are, in the main, affectionate and obliging. But we sometimes observe that in you, which we could wish nobody took notice of but ourselves; or rather, that you would strive to get quite the better of it, that we, who love you so dearly, might be no more grieved. It is a certain self-willed *impatience*, which disposes you, when your inclinations are overruled, or when anything is desired of you which does not exactly please you—to pout, frown, and alter your countenance, so that you often appear to a disadvantage in company. You do not seem to find, or to think of finding, a pleasure in giving up a thing to please your mamma—but had rather have your own way. Now if you sit down and consider how much we love you, and study to oblige and please you, I hope you will strive against this impatient temper. I call it so, because I do not believe it is owing to a lack of affection and gratitude on your part—but rather the effect of a something in your natural temper, which, if you strive against, I hope you will be enabled to overcome.

Besides what you owe to our love and tenderness, I can give you a further reason why you should attend to this point. I have told you repeatedly, and I tell you again, that your cousin's coming to live with us, will not make the slightest alteration in our love for you. You are still, and will be, our own dear child; we have love enough for you

both. But in the outward expression of our love, something must, of course, depend upon behavior. We are sometimes obliged, though with reluctance, to reprove and contradict you; now we cannot reprove her, because she never gives us an opportunity. In the seven months she has been with us, I never once knew her to argue with us, nor have I once seen a cloud upon her brow for a single moment. She watches our looks, and if she perceives the slightest hint that anything she proposes is not quite agreeable to us, she is done with it in a moment, and gives it up with a smile; which shows that it costs her nothing—but that she really prefers pleasing us—to the pleasing herself. Now you must allow, my dear, that this behavior is very engaging. I wish you to be equally engaging, and not to seem to come short of her in anything.

Have you heard of your good friend, Mrs. ____ 's, illness? They have no expectation of her recovery; nay, perhaps she is dead before this time. How well she seemed when we dined there but lately! So uncertain is life—even young people have no assurance of continuing here; but I hope you will pray as David did, "Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life." Psalm 39:4, and that the Lord will hear your prayer. When you come to know him as your Lord and Savior, you may sing Simeon's song. And we cannot enjoy life with true comfort, until we are delivered from the fear of death.

I am your very affectionate father

Letter 20

October 23, 1783

My dear child,

When I showed my last letter to your mamma, I thought she looked as if she was almost unwilling that I should send it; but she did not say so, and therefore it went. She is unwilling to give you pain, and so am I. But I persuaded myself you would take it (as I meant it) as a proof of my love. Now and then I must gently give you a word of advice—but it will always be much more pleasing to me to *commend*, than to *find fault*. Your welfare is very near my heart, and I feel a warm desire that your behavior, in every respect, should be such as to engage the esteem and affection of all who know you. I remember, when you were a little girl at Northampton school, I once told you, in a letter, that when the Lord, in his providence, sent you to my care, I received you as his gift; and in the pleasing hope of being an instrument in his hand of doing you good, I found such affection for you, that I would not part with you for your weight in gold. And though you are much heavier now than you were then, I can say the same still.

Mrs. W ____ had been ill some days before I heard of it, and then I was told she was at the point of death. This information, with some hindrances and difficulties in the way, prevented my going to ____, so that I did not see her. She was an old and kind acquaintance, and though of late years I was not often in her company, I feel that I have lost a friend whom I loved.

Such is the state of this world. If we live long in it, we must expect to see our friends drop off one after another, as the leaves at this season of the year fall from the trees. But the pain which Christians feel at parting with their Christian friends, is alleviated by two considerations:

first, that now that they are gone, they are much more happy than they could be here; and secondly, we hope before long to be with them again, and to share in their songs and joys before the throne of God.

This, my dear child, is the desire of my soul for you, that while you live, and when you die, you may be the Lord's. Nothing but this will satisfy me. And for this I often pray. My thoughts and prayers are often employed for you, when perhaps you are asleep. I cannot make many very particular requests for you, because I know not what is best for you; but when I pray that you may have wisdom and grace to seek and know the Lord, and that he will be graciously pleased to be your Savior and Shepherd, and the Guide of your youth—I am sure I do not ask amiss. I have a cheerful hope that he will put you among his children, guide you through this wilderness world by his counsel, and afterwards receive you to his glory; and that he sent you to me, that you might have the benefit of those means of grace and instructions, which by his blessing will be effectual to make you wise unto salvation.

Though he alone can work in you to will and to do according to his good pleasure—yet there is something incumbent on you. He has said, "Those who seek me—shall find me." You must therefore seek him; and he is not far from you. He is about your bed, and about your path. Yes, he is still nearer. I hope there are seasons when you can perceive him knocking, as it were, at the door of your heart. Do not you at times perceive something within you bearing witness to the truths of his Word; warning you of the evil of sin, reminding you of death and eternity, and stirring up your desires towards himself? At such times you may be sure the Lord is near. He made the heart, and he knows how to affect it.

Such warnings and calls from his good Spirit, I can recollect when I was a child younger than you; I can remember getting into corners by myself, and praying with some earnestness, before I was eight years old. Afterwards, alas, I proved rebellious, I cast off his fear, and would have my own way; and thereby I plunged myself into abundance of sin and misery. But I hope you will be more obedient. Think of him as often as you can; make a point of praying to him in secret, remembering that when you are most alone, he is still with you. When you pray, endeavor simply to express your needs and feelings just as if you were speaking to me. Fine words and phrases, some people abound in; but *true prayer is the genuine language of the heart, which the Lord understands and accepts, however brokenly expressed*. The woman of Canaan only said, "Lord, help me!" The publican's prayer was almost as short, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" And both were heard!

The Bible, or the New Testament, is frequently used at school, as a school-book; and children often think no more of it than just to read their appointed lesson. But I hope you will consider it as *God's book*, and when you take it in hand, open it with reverence, and read with attention, as you think you would if you expected to hear him speak to you with an audible voice from heaven. The plainest and most affecting part of the Bible, is the history of our Savior in the evangelists—read it often, that you may be well acquainted with it. I pray him to enable you to understand what you read. Surely when you read *who* he is, *what* he did, what he suffered—and what he has promised to poor sinners—you will, you must, love him! And if you once love him, you will study to please him. The Lord bless you. Give our love to your governess, and all friends.

Believe me to be your very affectionate father

Letter 21

October 30, 1783

My dear child,

Though I lately sent you a long letter by the post, which I hope you received on Tuesday, I must write again. I take a new pen and a sheet of gilt paper, that I may, in the best manner I can, make you a return for your letter which I received yesterday. I would not delay long to let you know how much your mamma and I were pleased with it. It is a great happiness to us that we are well assured of your desire and intention to oblige us; and we hope not to be behind-hand with you.

We are very far from thinking your temper is bad; the manner of your answer is a proof to the contrary. You may sometimes need a word of *advice* or *admonition*; I believe even this will not be often necessary; and when there is occasion, my affection will prompt me to offer it with so much tenderness, that it shall look as little like reproof as possible—and I hope and expect to find many more occasions for commending than for reproofing you.

Should it please the Lord to spare your cousin, a time will come when you will live together, and, I believe, love each other dearly. I would certainly wish you to imitate her in anything that you see is commendable; and there will be other things, I trust, in which you may be a pattern to her. Thus you may be mutually useful to each other; and we will love you both, and rejoice in you both. We shall not love you a hair's breadth the less than we would have done—if we had never seen her.

Indeed, I cannot be sufficiently thankful to the Lord, that when he was pleased in his providence to put two children under my care, they should be both of such an amiable, affectionate disposition, as

would win my love if they had been strangers, and not so nearly related as you and your cousin are to us. And though I consider you both now as my own children—yet you are still my eldest, and my having a second, will be no prejudice to your birth-right.

I have not a bit of news that I can think of to send you. Your mamma is pretty well, and your cousin likewise; but she is much confined, for if the weather is either wet or cold, we cannot venture her abroad. She does not seem to want to go out, except to church. When we are going there, it is some trial to her to be left behind; but she is satisfied, because she thinks her aunt is the most proper judge whether she can go with safety or not.

You, my dear, are favored with health, and I hope you will be thankful for it. Your cousin, and twenty other young people I could name, know the value of health—by the lack of it. The Lord can make sickness a blessing when he is pleased to send it; but still a good state of health is a great privilege. If your life should be prolonged, it may be a good while before increase of years makes a sensible change in your constitution—but you will feel it at last. When you see an old woman tottering about with a stick, consider that she was once as young as you are now, and probably her spirits as lively, and her limbs as agile as yours. Suppose it may be fifty years before you are like her—such a space, which seems long before-hand, will seem very short when it is past, and there is hardly one in fifty of your age, that will be alive fifty years hence.

Dangers stand thick through all the ground,
To push us to our tomb;
And fierce diseases wait around,
To hurry mortals home.

How just, therefore, and important is that advice, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come!"

And whom should we remember—if we forget him? Our Creator is our Redeemer! Isaiah 54:5. He is the Savior, the Lover of souls, who assumed our nature, that he might be capable of dying for us. Shall we not remember him who endured agonies, and sweat blood, and hung upon the cross—that we might escape the misery we have deserved, and be made the children of God?

I commend you to his love, and pray him to write his name upon your heart. We all join in love to you.

Believe me to be your affectionate father

Six Letters to Friends

Letter 1

To Mr. B.

May 1, 1780

My dear sir,

I blame myself, and ask your pardon, for not writing sooner. My sickness occasioned me so many visits from kind friends, that it added little to my usual time of leisure. As the news of your illness and your amendment came together, my sympathy was concern mixed with pleasure; and, having as much that seemed to require immediate attention as I could well find time for, I believe the hope

of seeing you soon in town, made me the more easy to let your letter be by unanswered.

My arm, I believe, is nearly, if not quite, well, excepting a stiffness in it, from being so long confined in one position. I have it now as much out of the sling as in it. I have been able to wear my coat for a week past; the surgeon, however, thinks it prudent, though not necessary, to keep on my bandage for a few days longer. I believe the arm has advanced as happily, as speedily, and with as little pain, as possible.

My spirit has been peaceful; it is a small thing to say resigned, for I have seen it a dispensation full of mercy, and have not been permitted to feel a wish that it had been otherwise. Especially as, through the Lord's mercy, my wife felt no abiding ill effect from the great terror she was at first seized with, and which I feared might have brought a return of all her nervous complaints. But He is very gracious to us, and she is remarkably well.

I think you must have suffered more than I have done of late. Be assured that our faithful and good Shepherd affords us strength according to our day. He knows our frame, and will lay no more on us than He will enable us to bear. Yes, no more than He will cause to work for our good—He delights in our prosperity. Our comforts of every kind come free and undeserved. But, when we are afflicted, it is because there is a need-be for it. He does not afflict willingly. Our trials are either beneficial medicines, or honorable appointments, to put us in such circumstances as may best qualify us to show forth His praise. Usually he has both these ends in view.

We always stand in need of correction; and, when He enables us to suffer with patience, we are then happy witnesses to others of the truth of his promises, and the power of His grace in us. For nothing but the influence of God's Spirit can keep us, at such times, either

from despondency or impatience. If left to ourselves in trouble, we shall either sink down into a sullen grief—or toss and rebel like a wild bull in a net!

Our different posts are, as you observe, by the Lord's wise appointment; and therefore must be best for us respectively. Mine is full of trials and difficulties! Indeed, I would soon make sad work of it—without His continual help; and would have reason to tremble every moment—if He did not maintain in me a humble confidence, that He will help me to the end.

He bids me, "fear not!" and at the same time He says, "Happy is the man who fears always." How to fear, and not to fear, at the same time, is, I believe, one branch of that secret of the Lord which none can understand but by the teaching of his Spirit.

When I think of my deceitful heart, of the treacherous world, of the malicious powers of darkness—what a cause of continual fear—I am on an enemy's ground, and cannot move a step but some snare is spread for my feet! But, when I think of the person, grace, power, care, and faithfulness of my Savior—why may I not say, "I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge!"

I wish to be delivered from anxious and unbelieving fear, which weakens the hands, and disquiets the heart. I wish to increase in a humble jealousy and distrust of myself, and of everything about me; I am imperfect in both respects—but I hope my desire is to him who has promised to do all things for me.

Your desire for the *mortification of self*, is, I hope, mine likewise. Yet I would regulate it by the Word of God, so as not to expect more than is promised. I cannot properly expect a perfect exemption from

conflict, because I believe it is the will of God I should have something to conflict with while I am here. To be sensible of the motions of sin in me, watchful against them, humbled for them, this I desire; and I believe the more I advance in grace, the more feelingly I shall say, "Behold, I am vile!"

But, desirable and precious as sanctification is, it is not, I trust it will never be, the ground of my hope. Nor, were I as sinless as an angel in glory, could I have a better ground of hope than I have at present. For my acceptance with God, I rely, (oh, that I indeed did,) simply, wholly, and solely, upon the obedience unto death of my Substitute. Jesus is my righteousness, my life, and my salvation. I am still a sinner; but he who knew no sin was made sin for me, that I might be the righteousness of God in him. This right to eternal life, by believing in the Son of God, is, in my view, equal in all who do so believe, and as perfect and sure when they first believe, as at the last moment of life; as perfect and sure in the thief on the cross, as in an apostle or martyr.

An infant is as truly alive as a grown person, though all his members and faculties are in a state of weakness. Therefore, with respect to my acceptance, I would put my *graces* as much out of the question as my actual *sins*. That Word suited me at first, and will suit me at the end, "To him who works not—but believes on him who justified the ungodly."

This morning (May-day) I preached for Mr. R ____ a sermon to young people; it reminded me a little of my annual new-year's sermon at ____; but, though I had some liberty, I feel a difference between speaking to one's own children, and those of another. They were my own proper charge, and the concern of their souls was laid upon me with a peculiar weight.

Letter 2

December 3, 1780

My dear sir,

The Lord is risen indeed. This is his day, when we are called to meet in his house, and (we in this branch of his family) to rejoice at his table. I meant to write yesterday—but could not. I trust it is not unsuitable to the design and privilege of this day, to give you a morning salutation in his name; and to say, "Come, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!"

If I am not mistaken, I have met you this morning already. Were you not at Gethsemane? Have you not been at Golgotha? Did I not see you at the tomb? This is our usual circuit, yours and mine, on these mornings, indeed every morning; for what other places are worth visiting? what other objects are worth seeing? Oh, this wonderful love! this blood of sovereign efficacy! the infallible antidote which kills sin, cures the sinner, gives sight to the blind, and life to the dead! How often have I known it turn sorrow into joy.

O you Savior and Sun of the soul, shine forth this morning, and cheer and gladden all our hearts! Shine upon me and mine, upon all whom I love, and on all who love you! Shine powerfully on my dear friends at ____, and let us know, that, though we are absent from each other—that you are equally near to us all.

I must go to breakfast, then dress, and away to court. Oh, for a sight of the King; and, oh, to hear him speak; for his voice is music, and his person is beauty! When he says, "Remember Me!" and the heart hears, what a train of incidents is at once revived!—from the manger to the cross, what he said, what he did, how he lived, how he loved, how he died; all is marvelous, affecting, humbling, transporting! I

think I know what I would *be*, and what I would *do*—if I could. How near would I get, how low would I fall, how would I weep and sing in the same breath; and with what solemn earnestness would I recommend him to my fellow-sinners. But, alas, when I would do good, evil is present with me. Pray for me, and help me likewise to praise the Lord; for his mercies are new every morning, and every moment.

Letter 3

January 8, 1781

My dear sir,

I understand your views and feelings so well, that my letter will not have such an air of condolence as some people might expect on a like occasion. The first thing that strikes me respecting your personal concern in the late awful calamity, calls rather for congratulation. I see your beloved son preserved in the midst of general ruin; in his preservation I see the immediate, the wonderful hand of the Lord stretched out; I consider it as an answer to your prayers; I humbly hope it is a token of further good respecting him, and that the restraining word, 'Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it,' is applicable to his case. I find, likewise, that but one life was lost on your estate; which, to a mind like yours, I am sure is an alleviating circumstance. For the rest, I am sure you have lost nothing but what he, if he sees it good, can restore with a large increase; nothing that is directly necessary to your peace and comfort, even in the present life; nothing that is worth naming when compared to that which you love above all.

You may still, and I trust you will, find the Lord as near and as gracious; and the light of his countenance as sweet and as cheering

as ever. You have an estate in a kingdom which cannot be shaken, out of the reach of earthquakes, hurricanes, and enemies. Indeed, you do not think you have lost anything, in strictness of speech, because you have been taught of God not to consider anything you possess as properly your own. You feel yourself the Lord's servant and steward, and whether he is pleased to enlarge or abridge the talents he has entrusted to your care; your chief solicitude in either case, is to be *faithful* to every intimation of his will. I believe, that, if the whole produce of Jamaica centered in your warehouses, the Lord would not permit you to forget that you are a stranger and pilgrim upon earth; and I believe, if you were not to receive a pepper-corn from it in future, he would still make you happy in himself.

I judge thus for what he has done for you already—he has given you a taste and a desire which nothing but himself can satisfy; he has shown you the secret of his holy religion; and, by leading you to fix your dependence upon him, has raised you to a noble state of *independence* with regard to *creatures* and *contingencies*, which are all in his hand, and can do us neither good nor harm but of his bidding.

Barbados and *Martinico*, it seems, have suffered still more. It is observable, that, during the whole summer, while we and the French had large fleets in those seas, the Lord would not permit them to do any considerable harm on either side. He was pleased to take the business into his own hands, and has shown us how easily he can strike such a blow as shall constrain even enemies to commiserate each other.

Mr. P ____ told me this morning, that it is supposed *Jersey* is taken. Thus the cloud grows darker. The flames of war are still spreading wider, and difficulties seem increasing on every side. The Lord's

hand is lifted up; men will not see—thus far the prophecy is fulfilled. I tremble at what may further concern us in the following clause, "But they shall see!" If he undertakes to make *this insensible nation* know that he is the Lord, he will certainly accomplish his purpose. What it may cost us before we learn the lesson, who can say? But he will be mindful of those who fear him. That word, "It shall be well with the righteous!" cannot be broken. Hitherto the nation is in a deep sleep, and professors, I am afraid, are sadly slumbering. I can hardly find anywhere around me, (alas, that I cannot find in myself!) a spirit of humiliation and prayer, in any degree answerable to the state of the times. Oh, that the Lord would graciously revive us! We have, indeed, abundance of preaching and abundance of hearers; there are, doubtless, many individuals alive and in earnest; but the bulk of those who avow an attachment to the gospel are too little affected either for themselves or others.

My wife is pretty well; she has had but little complaint since P ____ has been ill, who likewise is now getting better. The child scalded her foot on new-year's day, through mercy but slightly—it was a gentle memorial to us how entirely dependent we are on his protection for safety in our smoothest hours. We are frail and feeble creatures, it is not needful to raise a hurricane to destroy us—were he only to withdraw his arm for a moment, some unthought-of evil would presently overwhelm us. It did not prevent her hearing my sermon to young people that night; but she has been confined to the house since. My health continues firm, and I am enabled to preach with apparent liberty, with what effect God only knows; but I am sometimes afraid there is more *sound* than *power*. I am well attended, and encouraged to hope that I do not labor wholly in vain.

May the grace of our good Shepherd be with us all. Let us *praise* him for what is past, and cheerfully *trust* him for what is to come. He

knows *where* and *what* we are, and numbers the very hairs of our heads.

I am, most affectionately, your much obliged, etc.

Letter 4

March 13, 1781

My dear Miss M _____,

If *wishes* and *purposes* were always effectual, I would not have been so long three letters in debt to your house—I would answer all if I could—but perhaps it will take the leisure time of two or three mornings to answer one, and the first must be to you, because it is so seldom I have one from you to answer.

I saw Mr. _____ yesterday; he informed me of Mr. _____ 's death. Indeed, the suddenness of it struck me. The uncertainty of life has been a theme for declaration in all ages—but by how few is it practically laid to heart. Happy are those who know whom they have believed, and are waiting with desire his recall home to himself, that they may see him as he is. I am bound to pray that this *bereaving stroke* may be sanctified to his family.

But Mr. _____ told me something that affected me still more nearly—he says that Mrs. B _____ has been worse this past two weeks. I believe I am foolish and inconsistent—but I cannot help it. When the Lord has taken her to himself, I hope I shall say, "Your will be done!" I hope I shall follow her with my thoughts, and feel some satisfaction in thinking—Now she is out of the reach of pain and sorrow forever! Now she sees her Savior's face without a veil, and sings his praise without the interruption of a single sigh! Now she is a pillar of the heavenly temple, and shall go no more out. But at present, and while

she is continued with us, I feel an anxiety and a desire, which I fear are wrong; I feel unwilling too lose such a friend; and I am sure I feel for those who are more nearly interested in her than myself.

Tell her, that my wife and I are not willing to think any but her own children can exceed us in love and sympathy; that we shall be thinking of her, speaking of her, and, I hope, praying for her daily, and for you all. Well, let the flesh say what it will, we know that all is well. We cannot love her so well as he who bought her with his blood. And, ah, how faint is our tenderness compared with his! *He will not let his children feel one pain too many, or too sharp!* He will enable them to glorify him even in the fire, and he will soon wipe away every tear.

I am glad to find that the Lord leads you further and deeper into the mysteries of his salvation. As a theory, it may be expressed in a few words—but to live a life of faith on the Son of God as our wisdom, righteousness, and strength, considered as a matter of experience, is what we usually attain to by slow degrees, and at best but imperfectly. We are always capable of further advances, and are frequently obliged to learn over again that which we thought we had learned already. My sentiments on this point seem tolerably clear—but in practice I fall sadly short, and feel that the principles of *self* and *unbelief*, are still deeply rooted in me. However, I trust I am in the school of the great Teacher, and I humbly hope he will carry on the work he has begun.

What I want, what I pray for—is a simple dependent spirit, to be willing to put myself entirely into his hands, to follow him without asking questions, to believe him without making objections, and to receive and expect everything in his own time, and in his way. This is the course we take when we consult an earthly physician; we consult

him—but we do not pretend to direct him. Thus would I give myself up to my heavenly infallible Physician; but this is one branch of the good, which, when I would do, I find evil is present with me. But it is likewise one part of the sickness I groan under, and which He has in mercy undertaken to cure; and therefore, though I am very sick indeed, I trust I shall not die—but live and declare his wonderful works.

I long aimed to 'be something'. I now wish I was more heartily willing to 'be nothing'. A cipher, a round o is by itself a thing of no value, and a million of them set in a row amount to no more than a single cipher. But, place a significant figure before the row, and you may soon express a larger number than you can well conceive. Thus my wisdom is o, my righteousness is o, my strength is o. But, put the wisdom, power, and grace of Jesus before them, let me be united to him, let his power rest upon my weakness, and be magnified in it, in this way I shall be something. Not in and of myself—but in and from Him.

Thus the apostle speaks of being filled with all the fullness of God. What an amazing expression! Thus, so far as we die to self, Christ lives in us. He is the light by which we see; He is the life by which we live; He is the strength by which we walk; and, by his immediate virtue and influence, all our works and fruits are produced. We have no sufficiency in ourselves—but we have all-sufficiency in Him! At one and the same time—we feel a conviction that we can do nothing—and an ability to do all things that fall within the line of our calling. When I am weak—then I am strong.

I am, your very affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 5

April 12, 1781

My dear Miss M _____ ,

Accept my sincere, though rather tardy thanks for your letter of the 11th of February. I beg you likewise to accept my assurance, that, if time and opportunity were with me in any proportion to my inclination, your letters would be very speedily answered.

I knew you would be a favorable reader of *Cardiphonia*. Your kind partiality to the writer would dispose you to put the best construction on what you read; and your attachment to the design and principal subject of the letters, would make them welcome to you. We can put up with smaller faults, when a person is disposed to praise those who we dearly love. I trust my pen is chiefly devoted to the praise of Jesus your beloved, and so far as I succeed, I am sure what I write will be acceptable to you.

How can I not praise Him—since He has snatched me as a brand from the burning, and quenched the fire of my sins in His own blood! How can I not praise Him—since He has given me a glance of His excellency? If any do not love Him—it is surely because they do not know Him. To see Him but once with the eye of the soul—is to be convinced that He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely! His person is glory, His name is love, His work from first to last is grace. The moment the sinner is enabled to behold Him—he is seized with greater admiration than the queen of Sheba felt when brought into the presence of Solomon! Those alone are happy, who, as children and servants in His family—stand continually before Him, to wait upon Him, admire Him, and hear His wisdom.

But, all—how faint are my conceptions; how little do I know of him; and how little of that little which I deem my *knowledge*, is realized to

my *heart!* What trifles are sufficient to hide him from my view, and to make me almost forget that he is nearer to me than any object that strikes my sense? Is it so with you? Let us at least rejoice in prospect of the promised hour, when veils, and clouds, and walls shall be removed, and we shall see him as he is; so see him, as to have all our desires satisfied in him, and fixed upon him, and will be completely transformed into his image.

My mind frequently anticipates the pleasure I propose in a visit to B____, but it is not likely to take place as soon as I wished. I had hoped to leave London soon soon—but circumstances are likely to forbid it. My times are in the Lord's hand, and, if he sees it best for me to be gratified, he will make it practicable, and his providence will likewise determine the fittest season. I wish not to be impatient—but to refer myself to him. This is certain, when he opens the door, and says, 'Go!' I shall set off with alacrity, for I long to walk upon that lawn, and to sit in that chair, and to converse with those dear friends who have deservedly so much of my heart.

Thank Miss M ____ for her letter. We rejoice to hear that your dear mamma is better. I believe I think of her daily, and often in the day; and this not only for the love I bear her—but for my own relief. My wife is often ill, sufficiently so to awaken my feelings for her. But, when I reflect how the power, grace, and faithfulness of our Lord and Savior, support under much severer trials, it disposes me in some measure to submission, thankfulness, and confidence. He can make those trials that appear to be heaviest, tolerable.

I shall certainly write before I come, when I can fix the time, and then, except something extraordinary interferes to require it, I shall not easily alter my plan; for, if we cannot be with convenience in the same house, it will be worth something to be in the same town, and

just to look at Mrs. B. a few minutes occasionally, if she can bear to receive us, and if she can bear no more. For I believe another interview with her, before the Lord sends his chariot and angels to remove her from this land of sorrow—will be the principal and most interesting object of our journey. Our other friends, if we are spared, we may hope to see at some future time. I consider her as in the situation of the apostle when he wrote 2 Timothy 4:6-7 "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

I am preparing materials for two more volumes of *Cardiphonia*. My present thought is, to have them ready for publication at a time when my pen will no longer be able to move. Whether any circumstances may send them abroad sooner, I know not; but, at my time of life, I ought to consider that period as not likely to be at a very great distance. I do not wish to be impatient for its arrival; but I do wish my willingness to live longer here, was more simply and solely from a desire of promoting my Lord's service, and the edification of his children—I hope this is not out of my mind—but I am afraid it is shamefully debased by an undue attachment to earthly things, and a lack of spirituality.

Letter 6

June 8, 1780

My dear madam,

I sympathize with my fiends at _____, under the afflictive dispensations with which the Lord has been pleased to visit the town. He has a merciful design—even when he afflicts, and I hope *the rod* will be sanctified to those who were too negligent under the public

means of grace. I am not sorry for your friend's death, as you say she died in the Lord, for she had but little prospect of temporal comfort. Her death affected me more on account of her husband and family, to whom I hoped she would have been a comfort and a blessing. But we are sure the Lord does all things wisely and well. The moment in which he calls his people home—is precisely the best and fittest season. Let us pray (and we shall not pray in vain) for strength proportioned to our day, then we may have only to wait with patience, as our time likewise will shortly come. The bright, important hour of dismissing from this *state of trial* is already upon the wing towards us, and every heartbeat brings it nearer. Then every wound will be healed, and every desirable desire be fully satisfied.

My wife has some degree of the head-ache today—but her complaints of that kind are neither so frequent nor so violent as when at His mercies to us are great, and renewed every morning.

I have still a quarter of an hour for you; but now, when opportunity presents, a subject is not at hand, and I have no time to ruminate. I will tell you a piece of old news. "The Lord God is a sun and shield," and both in one. His light is a defense; his protection is cheering. He is a **shield** so long, and so broad, as to intercept and receive every arrow with which the quiver of divine justice was stored, and which would have otherwise transfixed your heart and mine. He is a shield so strong, that nothing now can pierce it, and so appropriately placed that no evil can reach us, except it first makes its way through our shield. And what a **sun** is this shield! When it breaks forth, it changes winter into summer, and midnight into day, in an instant. He is a sun, whose beams can not only scatter clouds—but the walls which sin and Satan are aiming to build in order to hide it from our view.

Public affairs begin to look more pleasing, just when they were most desperate. Affairs in America are in a more favorable train. A peace with Spain is supposed. I would hope for some *halcyon* days after the *storm*—but for the awful insensibility which reigns at home. But, if the Lord revives his people—we may hope he will hear their prayers.

This is a changeable world. The ins and the outs, being fastened upon the same rolling wheel, have each their turn to be uppermost. Really, one is tempted to smile and constrained to weep in the same breath. The Lord bless you and keep you.

I am most affectionately yours.

Fourteen Letters to a Pastor

Letter 1

September 6, 1708

Dear sir,

The prospect of corresponding with you gives me great pleasure, as I know you will kindly dispense with my neglect of forms, and bear with me and assist me, while I simply communicate such thoughts as may occasionally and without premeditation occur. Among a thousand mercies with which I am indulged, I often distinctly enumerate the use of the *pen*, and the convenience of the *post*; but especially that the Lord has given me so many friends among those who fear his name, without which, in my present sequestered situation, the *pen* and the *post* would be useless to me, (for I know but one subject on which it is much worth my while either to read or

write.) I hope you will not be angry with me for my promptness in adding your name to my list of such friends.

I had a safe and pleasant journey home, though the roads were disagreeable enough. But the pleasure of my visit would have made me amends, had the difficulties of the way been greater. You have been often in my thoughts since I saw you, and the topics of our conversation have not been forgotten. The patience with which you heard me differ from you, and the dispassionate desire you expressed to search out truth for its own sake, affected me much. Such a disposition is to me a sure evidence of the finger of God; for your learning, your years, and your rank and character in the University, would have the same effect on you, as the like considerations have on too many—if the grace of God had not taught you, that, notwithstanding any distinctions and advantages which are admired among men, we are all naturally upon a *level* as to the perception of divine truths; and can receive nothing that is valuable in the sight of God, unless it be given us from heaven.

When we begin to know ourselves, and to feel the uncertainty and darkness which are inseparable from our fallen nature, how comfortable and encouraging is it to reflect, that God has given us his infallible Word, and promised us his infallible Spirit, to guide us into all necessary truth; and that in the study of the one, and in dependence upon the other, none can miss the way of peace and salvation, who are sincerely desirous to find it. But we are cautioned to keep our eye upon both; and the caution is necessary, for we are too prone to separate what God has joined together, Isaiah 8:20, 1 Cor. 2:10-11.

What strange mistakes have been made by some who have thought themselves able to interpret Scripture by their own abilities as

scholars and critics, though they have studied with much diligence! Unless our dependence upon *divine* teaching bears some proportion to our diligence, we may take much pains to little purpose. On the other hand, we are directed to expect the teaching and assistance of the Holy Spirit only within the limits, and by the medium of the written Word. For he has not promised to reveal *new* truths—but to enable us to understand what we read in the Bible—and if we venture beyond the pale of Scripture, we are upon enchanted ground, and exposed to all the illusions of our imagination. But an attention to the Word of God, joined to humble supplications for his Spirit, will lead us to new advances in true knowledge.

The exercises of our minds, and the observations we shall make upon the conduct of others, and the dispensations of God's providence, will all concur to throw light upon the Scripture, and to confirm to us what we there read concerning ourselves, the world, and the true happiness revealed to sinners in and through Jesus Christ. The more sensible we are of the disease, the more we shall admire the great Physician; the more we are convinced that the creature is vanity, the more we shall be stirred up to seek our rest in God. And this will endear the gospel to us; as in Christ, and in him only, we can hope to find that righteousness and strength, of which we are utterly destitute ourselves.

I observe in many newspapers, the attestations of people who have been relieved in diseases by the medicines which they have tried, and therefore recommend to others from their experience. Innumerable cases might be published to the honor of the great Physician; none more memorable perhaps than my own. I was laboring under a complication of disorders; fired with raging madness, possessed with many devils, (I doubt it not,) bent upon my own destruction; but he interposed, unsought, undesired. He opened my eyes, and pardoned

my sins; broke my fetters, and taught my once blasphemous lips—to praise his name. Oh, I can, I do, I must commend it as a faithful saying, That Christ Jesus is come into the world to save sinners; there is forgiveness with him; he does all things well; he makes both the dumb to speak, and the deaf to hear.

I remain, with due respect, dear sir, your most obedient servant.

Letter 2

November 1, 1768

Dear sir,

By this time I suppose you have received and perused Mr. B ____ 's book. In point of fact, I think he has unanswerably proved that the sense of the Articles, and the sentiments of the most eminent men in our church, until about Bishop Laud's time, are expressly in favor of what is called *Calvinism*. How far you may be satisfied with his endeavors to establish those points from Scripture, particularly the doctrine of the 17th Article, I know not; nor am I very anxious about it. The course you are taking to read the Scripture for yourself, in a humble dependence upon the promised teaching of the Holy Spirit, will, I doubt not, lead you into all necessary truth.

The best of men are permitted to retain some differences in sentiment upon less essential points. I remember the time when the doctrines of **election** and **predestination** were all offence to me; and, though now Scripture, reason, and experience concur to establish me not only in one or two—but in all the particulars of *Calvinism*—yet I believe several people whom I love and honor will not receive them with the same satisfaction. But the longer I live, the more I am constrained to adopt that system which ascribes all the power and glory to the grace of God, and leaves nothing to the creature—but sin, weakness, and shame. Everyone must speak for

themselves; and for my own part, I cannot ascribe my present hopes to my having cherished and improved an inward something within me; but, on the contrary, I know I have often resisted the motions and warnings of God's Spirit; and, if he had not saved me by sovereign grace, and in defiance of myself—I must have been lost! Nay, to this hour I feel an evil principle within me, tempting me to depart from the living God. I have no inherent stock of goodness upon which I can hope to hold out hereafter—but stand in need of a continual supply, and emphatically understand our Lord's words, "Without me you can do nothing." For I find I am not sufficient of myself so much as to think a good thought.

I have had opportunity of reading but a few pages of Dr. Smith's Select Discourses. He is very learned, sensible, and ingenious. I could admire him as a philosopher—but I cannot approve him as a divine. A sentence or two in his ninth page seems to me explanatory of his whole system; where, speaking of our Lord Christ he says, "His main scope was to promote a holy life, as the best and most compendious way to a right belief." If this sentence were exactly inverted, it would speak the very sentiment of my heart. That by our own industry and endeavor, we shall acquire a qualification to enable us to a right faith, seems to me as improbable, as that any cultivation which can be bestowed upon a bramble-bush will enable it to produce figs.

I believe human nature is **totally depraved**; blind as to any spiritual understanding, dead as to any spiritual desires; and until we have received faith, though tempers, inclinations, and circumstances occasion a great variety of appearances and outward characters among men—yet the description of the carnal mind, as enmity against God, will equally suit us all. And I believe that, when God is about to show mercy to any person, he begins by enlightening the understanding to perceive something of the wisdom, grace, and

justice revealed in the person of Christ crucified, and thereby communicating that principle of living faith which is the root of every gracious temper, and the source of every action that can be called good in a spiritual sense; John. 3:6. Matthew 12:33-35. Ephesians 2:1-9. Titus 3:3-7. I believe that, on the double account of inward depravity and actual transgression, we are (considered as in our natural state) liable to the curse of the law; from which, only faith in Jesus, as the proper atonement for sin, can set us free; John. 3:18, John. 3:36, and John. 8:24; and that the moment we truly believe, we are justified from all things, Act. 13:39, and delivered from all condemnation; Romans 8:1. In a word, that Christ is the all in all in a sinner's salvation; that we have no righteousness in the sight of God—but in his name; and we have no spiritual power—but so far as we are ingrafted in him by faith, as branches deriving sap and influence from the true vine; John. 15:1. Isaiah 45:24. 1 Cor. 1:30. Upon these principles I find that I cannot have satisfaction or comfort in the mystical writings, notwithstanding they say many excellent things occasionally, which may be very useful when understood in a gospel sense.

It would be impertinent to offer an apology for expressing myself with freedom, after the liberty you gave me. However, I wish you to believe, that I would not at any time, and especially when writing to you, betray a dogmatic spirit. In every other point I hesitate and demur, (and it befits me to do so,) when I differ from people of learning and years superior to my own. But, with respect to the grounds of a sinner's acceptance in the sight of God—it is only by the sufficiency, the all-sufficiency, the alone-sufficiency of Jesus Christ to do all for, in, and by, those who believe on his name. I think that the views which constrain me to dissent from Mr. Law, Dr. Smith, and many other respectable names, would embolden me to contradict even an angel from heaven, if I should hear him propose

any other foundation for hope than the person, obedience, sufferings, and intercession of the Son of God. Upon this subject, even my phlegmatic spirit will sometimes catch a little fire.

The dryness of spirit you speak of, though not pleasant, is beneficial. Such thirsting and longings as are expressed in the hundred and forty-third Psalm, are certainly from God, and will certainly be answered; for to whom did he ever say, "Seek my face in vain"?

I commend you to the keeping of the great Shepherd, and remain, dear sir, your obedient humble servant.

Letter 3

January 11, 1769

My dear sir,

It is true, I am obliged to plead business in excuse for my lack of punctuality to some of my correspondents; but I should be ashamed to make such a plea to you. The most pleasing parts of our employment bid fairest for our attention; and I shall expect to spend few hours of my leisure with more satisfaction to myself—than when I am answering your obliging letters; especially, as you encourage the freedom I have already used, and give me hope that the thoughts I offer are not unsuitable to the tenor of your inquiries into the truths of God. The Lord, on whom we both desire to wait for instruction, can make us mutually helpful to each other; and I trust he will, for it is his own work. I can easily say, *I am nothing*; I wish I could more truly feel it, for he will not disappoint the feeblest instrument that simply depends upon him, and is willing to give him all the glory.

Our preliminaries are now settled. What you say in your last letter is so satisfactory, that it would be impertinent in me to trouble you any

further either about Mr. Law or Mr. Calvin. **Whatever portion of truth is in either of their writings, was drawn from the fountain which we have in our own hands;** and we have the sure promise of divine assistance to give success to our inquiries.

I trust the defect of *memory* of which you complain, shall be no disadvantage to you; for you are not seeking a *polemical system*—but an *experimental possession of truth*; and, with respect to this, if you had all your faculties in full vigor, and could recall in a moment to all that you have ever been master of—you would still stand upon a level with the meanest of mankind. In this respect, what Elihu says, "God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him?" Job 36:22, is emphatically true, There is none who teaches like him. That heavenly light with which he visits the awakened mind, (like the light of the sun,) requires only eyes to see it. And a single sentence of his Word, when explained and applied by his Spirit to the heart, will have more effect than the perusal of many books. There is a majesty, authority, and power in His teaching, which is equally suited to all capacities. The wisest renounce their wisdom when he interposes; and the weakest are made wise unto salvation; Jer. 9:23-24. Isaiah 35:8.

I have somewhere read an acknowledgment of the great *Selden* to this purpose— "I have taken much pains to know everything that was esteemed worth knowing among men—but, of all my disquisitions and readings, nothing now remains with me to comfort me at the close of life—but this passage of Paul, 'It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' To this I cleave, and herein I find rest." You may be well assured, dear sir, that he who has taught your heart to say, "Your face, Lord, will I seek," will be undoubtedly found by you; for when did he say to the seed of Jacob, "Do you seek my face in vain?" Though, as you have more to give up in point of those abilities and

attainments which are highly esteemed among men than many others in the lower sphere of life, he may perhaps lead you in such a way, as to give you a full conviction, that these advantages can contribute nothing to spiritual wisdom and the peace which passes understanding.

If I had the pleasure (as I hope one day to have) of receiving you here, I could show you exemplifications of the same grace in a very different light. Here the poor and the weak, and the despised of the world, rejoice in the light of his salvation. Some who have hardly bread to eat, are content and thankful as if they possessed the whole earth, and can trace the hand of God in directing their petty concerns, and providing their daily food, as clearly as we can in the revolutions of a kingdom. Some who know no more of what passes without the bounds of the parish, than of what is doing beyond the Ganges River, and whose whole reading is confined to the Bible, have such a just understanding of the things of God, and of the nature and difficulties of the Christian life—that I derive more instruction from their conversation, (though none think themselves less qualified to teach,) than from all my books. I doubt not but you would be pleased with their simplicity. We live in much harmony, and are out of the noise of disputes, being, through mercy, of one judgment and of one heart. I speak now of the serious people, whom I consider as my own peculiar charge. As to the bulk of the parish, it is too much like other places.

Indeed, the great points of immediate concernment may be summed up in a few words. To have a real conviction of our sin and unworthiness; to know that Jesus is the all-sufficient Savior, and that there is no other; to set him before us as our Shepherd, Advocate, and Master; to place our hope upon him alone; to live to him who lived and died for us; to wait in his appointed means for the

consolations of his Spirit; to walk in his steps, and copy his character; and to be daily longing for the end of our warfare—that we may see him as he is. All may be reduced to these heads—or the whole is better expressed in the apostle's summaries, Titus 2:11-14, and Titus 3:3-8. But, though the lessons are brief, it is a great thing to attain any good measure of proficiency in them; yes, the more we advance, the more we shall be sensible how far we fall short of their full import.

Next to the Word of God, I like those books best which give an account of the lives and experiences of his people. Gillies's *Gospel History* contains a valuable collection of this sort, especially the first volume. Some of the letters and lives in Fox's Acts and Monuments, in the third volume, have been very useful to me. But no book of this kind has been more welcome to me than the Life of Mr. Brainerd, of New England, re-published a few years since at Edinburgh, and I believe sold by Dilly, in London. If you have not seen it, I will venture to recommend it, (though I am not fond of recommending books,) I think it will please you.

I suppose you have read Augustine's Confessions. In that book I think there is a lively description of the workings of the heart, and of the Lord's methods in drawing him to himself. It has given me satisfaction to meet with experiences very much like my own, in a book written so long ago. For both *nature* and *grace* have been the same in every age.

I make no apology for the miscellaneous manner of my letters. I sit down to give you my thoughts as they arise, without reserve and without study. I beg a remembrance in your prayers.

I am, very respectfully, your most affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 4

February 11, 1769

My dear sir,

Though, by the Lord's mercy, I have not, since the years of my miserable bondage in Africa, been much subject to a depression of spirits, I know how to sympathize with you under your present complaints; but, while I am sorry for your trials, I rejoice much more to observe the spirit of submission and dependence with which you are favored under them. Whatever may be the immediate causes of your troubles—they are all under the direction of a gracious hand, and each, in their place, cooperating to a gracious end. I think the frame of your spirit is a sure evidence that God is with you in your trouble; and, I trust, in due time, he will fulfill the other part of his promise—to comfort and deliver you, because he has given you to know his name; Psalm 91:14-15. It will be always a pleasure to me when a letter comes with your superscription; but, while writing is so painful to you, I shall be willing (since you are pleased to receive mine so favorably) to send you two or three for one, rather than expect a punctual return of answers, until your health and spirits shall enable you to gratify me without inconvenience to yourself.

Your saying that, "If I have never been in the like circumstances, it is impossible for me to conceive the uncomfortableness of them," reminds me of one admirable peculiarity of the gospel, which seems a fit topic for a paragraph in a letter to you at this time. I mean, the encouragement it affords us to *apply to our great High Priest*, from the especial consideration of his having felt the same sorrows which we also feel. Though he is now exalted above all our conceptions and praises, is supremely happy in himself, and the fountain of happiness to all his redeemed; yet he is still such a one as can be touched with a

feeling of our infirmities; Hebrews 4:15-16. He has not only a *divine knowledge*—but an *experimental perception* of our afflictions, "In all their suffering, He suffered" Isaiah 63:9. And, as Dr. Watts well expresses the thought—

Touched with a sympathy within,
He knows our feeble frame;
He knows what sore temptations mean,
For he has felt the same.

You complain of a *dejection of spirits*, which I apprehend nearly expresses the sense of Mark 14:33, "He began to be deeply distressed and horrified" which is one out of many of those emphatic words the evangelists use to give some apprehension of that depression, agony, and consternation of spirit which filled the soul of Jesus when he entered upon the great work of atoning for our sins. All that he endured from the hands of wicked men was probably very light—in comparison of what he began to suffer in the garden, when he was exposed to the fierce conflicts of the powers of darkness, and when the arrows of the Almighty drank up his spirits, and it pleased the Father to bruise him! Zech. 13:7. How different the cup *he* drank himself—from that which he puts into *our* hands! His was unmixed wrath and anguish; but all our afflictions are tempered and sweetened with many mercies. Yet we suffer, at the worst, unspeakably less than we deserve; but *he* had done nothing amiss.

Now let our pains be all forgot;
Our hearts no more repine;
Our sufferings are not worth a thought,
If, Lord, compared with Thine.

But what I chiefly intend is, that, having suffered for us—he knows how to pity and how to relieve us, by an *experimental sense* of the

sorrow which once filled his own soul, (yes, all his life long he was acquainted with grief,) even as we (if it is lawful to compare great things with small) are prompted to pity and to help those who are afflicted in the same way as ourselves. May he be pleased, by the power of his Holy Spirit, to reveal, with increasing guidance and power in your soul this mystery of redeeming love. Here is the source of consolation, that Jesus died for us, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. The knowledge of his cross, like the branch which Moses cast into the spring, Exo. 15:25, *sweetens* the bitter waters of afflictions, and sanctifies every dispensation of providence, so as to render it a means of grace.

A comfortable hope of our acceptance and reconciliation in him, is, I apprehend, that "preparation of the gospel of peace," which, for its continual use and application, the apostle compares to shoes, which, whoever wears, shall walk safely and surely through the thorny and rugged paths of our present pilgrimage, Ephesians 6:15. Deu. 33:25. Though there may be *many tribulations*—yet, since there can be *no condemnation* to those who are in Christ Jesus; since in the path of sufferings—we may see *his footsteps* before us; since it is the established law of the kingdom, Act. 14:22; since the time is short, and the hour coming apace, when all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and his grace engaged to be sufficient for us in the interim; why may we not say with the apostle, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear, so that I may finish my course with joy!"

There is no proportionate ground for comparison between the *sufferings* of the present life—and the *glory* that shall be revealed in us; Romans 8:18. So the apostle thought; and no man seems to have been better qualified to decide upon the point; for, on the one hand, his outward life was full of what the world calls *misery*, 1 Cor. 4:10-14. 2 Cor. 6:4-10, and 2 Cor. 11:23-28. And, on the other hand, he

had been caught up into the third heavens, and had seen and heard more than he could disclose in mortal language.

I shall be glad when you are able to inform me that your health and spirits are better, which I shall pray and wait for. The Lord has an appointed time for answering the prayers of his people. While his hour is not yet come, we can do nothing but look and wait at his mercy-seat. But, though he seems to tarry, he will not delay beyond the fittest season. Though he causes *grief*—he will have *compassion*. *Weeping* may endure for a night—but *joy* comes in the morning. In the mean time I commend you to those most gracious and comfortable promises, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. " Isaiah 41:10, and "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3, which, I trust, will be your present support, and the subject of your future praises.

I am respectfully, dear sir, your obedient and affectionate servant.

Letter 5

March 21, 1769

Dear sir,

In my last I engaged to write again before long, though I should not have one of yours to answer. And I hope soon after you receive this, that your leisure and spirit will permit you to write, at least a few

lines, to inform us of your welfare. My anxiety on your account would be greater—but that I know *you are in the hands of him who does all things well*, and conducts his most afflictive dispensations to those who fear him, with wisdom and mercy. As I am not fit to choose for *myself*, so neither can I choose for my *friends*.

The Lord knows what is best for you! When there is an especial need—be for your being in the furnace—He knows how to support you; and at what season, and in what manner, deliverance will best comport with His glory and your good-. These are the two great ends which He has in view, and which are inseparably connected together.

He knows our frame, and of what we are made. His pity exceeds that of the most tender parent. And though He causes grief—He will have compassion. Your afflictions which at present are not joyous but grievous, shall, when you have been duly exercised by them—yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. I trust the Lord gives you a measure of patience and submission to His holy will. If so, everything shall be well. And when He has fully tried you—you shall come forth as gold!

The thoughts of what we have deserved at His hands—and what Jesus suffered for our sakes—when applied by his Holy Spirit, have a sovereign efficacy to compose our minds, and enable us to say, "Not my will—but may Yours be done!" How unspeakably better is it to be chastened by the Lord now—than to be left to ourselves for a season, and at last condemned with the world.

The path of affliction is sanctified by the promise of God, and by the consideration of our Lord Jesus, who walked in it Himself, that we might not think it too much to tread in His steps. Yes, it has been a beaten path in all ages; for the innumerable multitudes of the redeemed who are now before the eternal throne, have entered the

kingdom by no other way. Let us not then be weary and faint—but cheerfully consent to be the followers of those who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises!

If, after much tribulation, we stand accepted before the Lord in His glory, we shall not then think much of the difficulties we met in our pathway to glory. Then sorrow and sighing shall cease forever—and songs of triumph and everlasting joy shall take their place! Oh, happy transporting moment, when the Lord God Himself shall wipe every tear from our eyes!

Until then, may the prospect of this glory which shall be revealed, cheer and comfort our hearts! Hitherto the Lord has helped us. He has delivered us in six troubles—and we may trust him in the seventh. Yes, if he was pleased to deliver us when we thought little of him, much more may we assure ourselves of his help—now that he has taught us to come to his throne of grace, and given us encouragement to come with boldness, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help at the time of need.

The newspapers (which in this retired place are the chief sources of our news) give us but a dark view of what is passing abroad. A spirit of discord is spreading in the nation, and we have hints and items respecting ecclesiastical matters, which I hope are premature, and without sufficient ground. But, whatever storms may arise, we have an infallible and almighty Pilot, who will be a Sun and a Shield to those who love Him! I endeavor to answer all fears respecting *political matters* with the sure declarations of the Word of God. Such as Psalm 99:1, Psalm 29:10-11, Isaiah 8:12-14, Isaiah 51:12-13, John 3:35, etc. Jesus is King of kings, and Lord of lords! He is King of the church, and King in the nations; who does his pleasure in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. Therefore by faith

in him, we may adopt the triumphant language of Psalm 2:1-12, Psalm 27:1-14, Psalm 46:1-11, and 118, for the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and knows how to deliver them that trust in him.

Oh, sir, what a light does the gospel of Christ throw upon the world when our eyes are open to receive it! Without it, all would be uncertainty and perplexity; but the knowledge of his person, blood, and righteousness; of the love he bears us, the care he exercises over us, and the blessings he has prepared for us—this knowledge gives peace and stability to the soul, in the midst of all *changes* and *confusions*. And, were it not for the remaining power of unbelief in our hearts, which fights against our faith, and dampens the force of divine truth, we should begin our *heaven* even while we are upon *earth*. We have need to adopt the apostle's prayer, and to say, "Lord, increase our faith!"

Believe me to be, with great respect, your most obedient and affectionate servant.

Letter 6

June 12, 1770

Very dear sir,

I make haste to answer your obliging favor of the 31st; the contents gave me much pleasure. I am glad to find that, though you have your share of trials in different ways, the Lord is pleased to support you under them, and do you good by them. So I trust you shall find it to the end. That valuable promise, "Your shoes shall be iron and brass; and as your days—so shall your strength be." Deuteronomy 33:25, intimates, that we must not expect a path strewn with flowers, or spread with soft carpets—but rather a rough and thorny path,

otherwise such shoes would be unnecessary. But it is sufficient if strength is given according to our day, and if the Lord is pleased to be with us. Though we should be led through fire and water—neither the flame shall kindle upon us, nor the floods drown us—his presence and love shall make us more than conquerors, and brings us at length into a wealthy place.

Our friend's conversion, if it could be generally known and understood, would be more effectual than many volumes of arguments to confirm what the Scriptures teach concerning the author, the nature, and effects of that great change which must be wrought in the heart of a sinner, before he can see the kingdom of God.

His natural and acquired abilities were great; his moral character, as it is called, unblemished; he was beloved and admired by his friends, and perhaps had no enemies. To see such a man made willing in an instant to give up all his supposed righteousness; to rank himself with the chief of sinners; and to glory only in those self-denying truths which a little before were foolishness to him; and to see him as suddenly possessed of a solid peace, reconciled to the thoughts of death, and rejoicing in a hope and an eternal happiness of which he had not the least idea until then—this is indeed wonderful.

But, though such an instance bears the impression of the immediate finger of God, no less evidently than the miracles wrought in Egypt—yet it cannot be perceived or understood in its full extent, by any person whose mind has not been enlightened by the same divine influence. And I doubt not—but if the Lord had spared his life, he would by this time have been either pitied or scorned in the university—as much as he had formerly been admired.

I think you may be well assured, sir, that the pleasure you feel, and the tears you shed, when you peruse the account, are the effects of your having yourself received the same Spirit. I trust that your prayer, that the Lord will be pleased to stretch out the arm of his mercy in like manner to you also, shall be fully answered as to the main point; but it is by no means necessary that it should be *just in the same manner* as to the instantaneous and inexpressible clearness of the discovery. The Lord sometimes shows us how he can finish his work in a short time, and therefore some of the objects of his mercy do not receive the light of his salvation until towards their last hours. But perhaps, if Mr. ____ had been appointed for life and usefulness in this world, he would have been taught these things in a more gradual manner.

"The soil produces grain—first the blade, then the stalk, and then the ripe grain on the stalk." Mark 4:28. The Lord compares the usual method of growth in grace—to the growth of grain, which is perfected by a slow and almost imperceptible progress. The seed is hidden for a time in the soil; and, when it appears, it passes through a succession of changes—the blade, the stalk, and lastly the ripe grain. And it is brought forward amidst a variety of weather: the dew, the frost, the wind, the rain, the sun—all concur to advance its maturity, though some of these agents are contrary to each other, and some of them, perhaps, seem to threaten the life of the plant! Yet, when the season of harvest returns, the grain is found ready for the sickle.

Just so, is His work of grace in the soul. Its beginnings are small, its growth for the most part slow, and, to our apprehensions, often precarious. But there is this difference in the resemblance: frosts and blights, drought or floods, may possibly disappoint the gardener's hopes. But the great Gardener of the soul—will not, and cannot be disappointed. What He sows—shall flourish in defiance of all

opposition! And, if it seems at times to fade—He can and He will revive it!

This is his usual method; but he has not bound himself by rules; and therefore, to show his manifold wisdom, he exhibits some special cases, like that of our late friend, to quicken our attention, and to convince us that he is very near us, that his Word is truth, and that he can do what he pleases.

For the most part, his people are exercised with trials and sharp temptations; for it is necessary they should learn not only what he can do for them—but how little they can do without him. Therefore he teaches them not all at once—but by degrees, as they are able to bear it. I can say as you do, that I am much a stranger to those *extraordinary manifestations* of God in my soul; however, if the Lord has given us to see the necessity, the worth, the suitableness, and wisdom of that method of salvation which is revealed in the gospel; if Christ is made precious and desirable to us, and we are willing to account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus the Lord—though there may be a difference in circumstances, the work is the same. And we have as good a right humbly to appropriate to ourselves the comfort of his promises, as if an angel were sent from heaven (as to Daniel) to tell us that we are greatly beloved.

I am respectfully, dear sir, your obedient and affectionate servant.

Letter 7

November 27, 1770

My dear friend,

I believe it is a considerable time since I wrote last—but much longer

since I heard from you. I hope your silence has not been occasioned by illness, or at least, that if you have been afflicted, that you have found your trials so sweetened, and so sanctified, by the divine blessing, that you have been enabled to rejoice in them. My affection prompts me to wish my friends an uninterrupted course of health and peace—but, if different dispensations are appointed them, it gives me comfort to think, that their trials come from his hand, who loves them better than I can do. And my better judgment tells me, that the afflictions of those who fear God, are on his part tokens of his love and favor; and with respect to themselves, necessary means of promoting their growth in faith and grace.

When Moses came to inform Israel that the time was at hand, when the Lord would put them in possession of the good land he had promised to their fathers, he found them in a state of great affliction; and had it not been so, they would have been little disposed to receive his message with pleasure. For they had a great natural *love to Egypt*; they hankered after it—even in the wilderness! If, therefore, Moses had come to them, and proposed an exodus from Egypt, while they were in a prosperous and happy situation, they would probably have been very unwilling to have left it! The Lord, therefore, who knew their weakness and their undue attachment to a country which was not to be their rest, was pleased first to *embitter Egypt* to them, and then the news of a *Canaan* provided for them, was welcome. And thus he deals with his people still.

Our affections cleave inordinately to the present world. Notwithstanding the many troubles we meet with, sufficient, as it *should* seem, to wean us from such a state of vanity and disappointment, we can but seldom feel ourselves, in good earnest, desirous to be gone! How much less should we be so—if everything went smoothly with us? It is happy for us if we have suffered enough

to make us desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one; but surely all the painful experiences we have hitherto met with, have not been more than sufficient to bring us into this waiting posture.

As long as we live, new trials will be needful. It is not that the Lord delights in grieving us and putting us to pain; on the contrary, He rejoices in the prosperity of His servants. No, it is not for His pleasure—but for our profit, that we may be made partakers of His holiness!

Perhaps you may have observed a **bird**, in a hedge, or upon the boughs of a tree; if you disturb it—it will move a little higher—and thus you may make it change its place three or four times. But if it finds, after a few trials, that you continue to follow it, and will not allow it to rest near you—it takes wing at last, and flies away!

Thus it is with us! When the Lord drives us from one creature-rest, we immediately perch upon another! But He will not allow us to stay long upon any. At length, like the bird, we are sensible that we can have no safety, no stable peace below! Then our hearts take flight and soar heavenwards, and we are taught by His grace to place our treasure and affections out of the reach of earthly vanities. So far as this end is accomplished, we have reason to be thankful and say, happy rod—that brought me nearer to my God!

Blessed be God for that gospel which has brought life and immortality to light; which reveals a Savior, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; who is both able and willing to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. The *desires* we feel towards him, faint and feeble as they are—are the *effect* of his own operation on our hearts; and what he plants—he will water. He does nothing by halves. Far be it from us to think that he should make us sensible of our need of him, teach us to pray for his assistance, make

so many express promises for our encouragement, and then disappoint us at last. What then would become of his honor and his truth, since he has already declared, "Him that comes unto me—I will never cast out!" To harbor a doubt either of his power or compassion, is to dishonor him. Men often disappoint our expectations; either their *purposes* change, or their *power* falls short, or something intervenes which they could not foresee; but to God—all things are known, all things are easy, and his purposes are immutable. He came into the world to save all sinners who put their trust in him. This was the joy set before him; for this he bled, for this he died. Having redeemed us by his blood, and reclaimed us in our wandering state by his Word and Spirit; having made us willing to commit ourselves unto him—he will not leave us to perish along the way, or allow any power to pluck us out of his hands!

My pen has run at random; one line has followed another without study or reserve. I sat down with a desire to fill the sheet—but knew not what I would say. Thus I usually write (without form or constraint) to those whom I love. If the Lord shall be pleased to make anything I have offered a word in season to you, I shall be glad.

I am, with great respect, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 8

July 7, 1771

My dear friend,

Having no letter of yours to answer, I must fill up my paper as I can. It would be a shame to say, *I have no subject*. There is one which can never be exhausted—the love of Christ! He the fountain from whence all our spiritual blessings flow—the ocean to which they tend. The love of God towards sinners, is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is

treasured up in him; it is manifested in him; it is communicated through him. Permit my pen to enlarge a little upon this thought.

The love of God is treasured up in Christ. He is the Head of his church; and all spiritual and eternal blessings are given in him, and for his sake alone—Ephesians 1:3-4. The promise of life is in him; and to him we are directed to look, as he in whom alone the Father is well pleased—Matthew 3:17. God beheld our lost, miserable condition, and designed mercy for us; but mercy must be dispensed in a way agreeable to his holiness, justice, and truth. Therefore, in the covenant of grace, sinners are no further considered than as the people who are to reap the benefit; but the whole undertaking, both as to the burden and the honor of it, was transacted with, and devolved upon, Jesus Christ the Lord, who freely engaged to be their Savior and Surety.

The manifestation of the love of God to sinners, is in Christ Jesus. His goodness and forbearance are, indeed, displayed in every morsel of food, and in every breath we draw; but his love to our souls is only revealed in Christ. And, oh, what love was this, to give his own only Son! In this gift, in this way of redemption, he has commended his love to us, set it forth to the highest advantage possible, so that neither men nor angels can fully conceive of its glory, Romans 5:8; and the apostle there emphatically styles it "His own love:" love peculiar to himself, and of which we can find no shadow or resemblance among creatures.

The effects of his love are communicated only through Christ Jesus. He is made of God unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. "All fullness is in him." He has received, and he bestows, every good and perfect gift. He gives grace, and he will give

glory. All our springs of life, strength, peace, and comfort, are in him; and without him we can do nothing.

I trust, my dear sir, in expressing my own sentiments on this point—I express yours also. That Jesus, who was once a man of sorrows, who now reigns the Lord of glory in that nature in which he suffered, is your hope and your joy. Yes, the Lord who has given you many seeming advantages, as he did to Paul, has enabled you, like him, to sacrifice them at the foot of the cross, and to say, *The things which were once gain to me, I count loss for Christ—yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus my Lord!* Phi. 3:5-10. This is to build upon a rock, to build for eternity, to rest upon a plea, which will overrule every charge in life, at death, and at judgment. Those who put their trust in him, shall be like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved. And other way of attaining stable peace, or receiving power to withstand and overcome the world, there is none.

Believe me to be, dear sir, your obliged and affectionate humble servant.

Letter 9

January 9, 1773

My dear sir,

Your own sentiments, which you are pleased to favor me with, afford me likewise great satisfaction. The Lord, who has given you a heart to seek and follow him, will, I trust, lead you on from strength to strength; and, if there is anything yet remaining, the knowledge and experience of which would add to your comfort and progress in the divine life—he will show it to you in his good time. He is the only effectual Teacher; and he communicates instruction to those who

simply seek him, at such seasons and in such degrees as he in his sovereign wisdom sees best.

I have too great a respect for your character and years, as well as too clear a sense of the little good that is done by *controversy*, to attempt to *dispute* with you. I shall be happy and honored if I should ever drop a sentence that God may be pleased to make useful to you; and I hope I am equally desirous to learn of you, and profit by you. The Scripture warrants us both not to call any man 'master'. Christ alone is the Lord of conscience; and no man's teaching is to be regarded but his. Men are to be followed so far as we can see they speak by his authority; the best are defective; the wisest may be mistaken. Yet truth can be but one. The more uncertainty and division we find in the judgments of our fellow creatures, the more need have we to rely upon the Word and authority of the only infallible Judge. He permits those whom he loves to differ in some things, that there may be room for the exercise of love, meekness, mutual forbearance, and compassion; but when men presume to take his chair, to intrench upon his work, and think themselves qualified and authorized to enforce their own sentiments by noisy arguments, and to prescribe themselves as a standard to others—though they may mean well—they seldom do good. They set out (as they think) in the cause of God; but it is soon leavened by unsanctified tempers, and befits their own cause; and they fight more for *victory* than for *edification*. When the Lord enables any to avoid these evils, and they can freely, simply, and in a spirit of love, open their minds to each other, then his blessing may be humbly hoped for.

I hope I love true candor; but there is a candor falsely so called, which I pray the Lord to preserve me from. I mean that which springs from an *indifference to truth*, and supposes that people who differ most widely in sentiment, may *all* be right in their different

ways, because they seem to mean well. But the gospel is a standard by which all men are to be tried, and a doctrine which must not be given up as a point of indifference because many people of respectable characters do not approve it. Paul observed no such "toleration" with those who would introduce another gospel. There is a great difference between those who maintain erroneous systems, and those who, though they are mistaken in some things, are faithful to the light they have already received, and are honestly seeking more from the Lord. To the latter I would show all possible candor; as to the former, candor, or rather Christian charity, requires me to be tender and compassionate to their *persons*—but to give no place to their *principles*, no not for an hour. The question is not, what *I* should think or hope if left to *my* own judgment—but what the *unerring Word of God* determines. By this I must abide.

I remain, begging an interest in your prayers, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 10

February 22, 1776

My dear sir,

I have longed to tell you, that the prospect of our correspondence being revived, gave me very great pleasure. I attributed its discontinuance sometimes to the gout, with which I knew you were often afflicted; then I began to think, perhaps you were removed to a *better world*; but, when I understood you were still living, I apprehended you saw no utility in the friendly debates we were formerly engaged in, and therefore chose to drop them. It was this suspicion that prevented me writing again; for, had I been sure *your silence* was not owing to this cause, you would have heard from me

again and again, for with you I would not have stood upon the terms of letter for letter.

I ought not, however, to have indulged such a suspicion, nor to have imputed your silence to a cause so contrary to the spirit of your letters; for in them you have always showed yourself gentle, candid, and patient, and not disposed to break off the fellowship merely for *difference in sentiments*. Some difference in our sentiments there has seemed to be all along; but I believe with you, that we essentially agree, and I cordially join you in the hope and persuasion that the difference, whatever it may be, will not abate my respect and regard for you, nor your kindness to me.

I desire to praise God in your behalf, that he has graciously supported you under your long affliction and confinement, and now given you a prospect of going abroad again. It is the prayer of my heart, that all your *crosses* and *comforts* may be sanctified to you, and that you may suffer no more than a gracious God sees needful to answer *his beneficial purposes* in favor of those who love him—to manifest, exercise, and strengthen your graces, and to give you an increasing sense that his power, wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness are engaged to promote your best happiness, and to ripen you for his kingdom and glory.

My leading sentiment with respect to the divine life is, that it is founded in a new and supernatural birth. In this I know that we agree. Mankind are miserably divided and subdivided by sects, parties, and opinions; but in the sight of God there are but two sorts of people upon earth—the children of his kingdom, and the children of the wicked one. The criterion between them (infallibly known only to himself) is, that the former are born from above, the others are not. If a person is born again, notwithstanding any incidental

mistakes or prejudices from which perhaps no human mind in this imperfect state is wholly free—he is a child of God and an heir of glory. On the other hand, though his professed opinions are quite conformed to the Scripture; though he be joined to the purest church; though he seem to have all gifts and all knowledge, the zeal of a martyr, and the powers of an angel; yet if he is not born of God, with all the splendid apparatus, he is but a *tinkling*, (or, as I should rather choose to render the word,) a *stunning* cymbal.

From this new birth, a new life, new perceptions, and new desires, take place in the soul! Sin, which was one delighted in—becomes his chief burden. And God, who before was little thought of—is sought after as our chief good. The need of his mercy is felt and acknowledged, and Jesus is approved and sought as the only way and author of salvation. These things I believe are never truly and experimentally known—but by the teaching and operation of the Holy Spirit; and, as he is God and not man, unchangeable in purpose, and almighty in power—when once he begins his work—he will in his own time accomplish it. I believe hatred of sin, thirst after God, poverty of spirit, and dependence upon Christ, are sure tokens and evidences of salvation; and whoever may have them I would esteem my brethren and my sisters, regardless of what church they belong to.

Yet, I believe, some thus far wrought upon, may be, and are, entangled with errors dishonorable to the grace of God, and detrimental to their own peace. There is much remaining darkness upon the mind; many people are greatly hindered by a *reasoning spirit*, and numbers are kept down by their attachment to a *favorite system, sect, and author*—so that perhaps they are long strangers to that steadfast hope and strong consolation which the gospel truth, when simply received, is designed to afford us; and which depends

upon the sense we have that we are nothing, and that Christ is all in all, and that our best graces and services are, and always will be in this life, defective and defiled, and that the sole exclusive ground of our hope and rejoicing is Jesus Christ, as made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away!" Isaiah 64:6

I desire to be more a partaker with you in that sense which the Lord has given you of the deficiency you find in your own graces, dispositions, and tempers, and the lack of due conformity to the mind that was in Christ. If you have cause of humiliation on these accounts, surely I have more. At the same time it is my prayer, that he may comfort you with those views of the freeness and riches of his grace, which enable me to maintain a hope in his mercy, not withstanding I feel myself polluted and vile. For, when my state and acceptance with God is the point in question, I am in a measure helped not to judge of it—by what he has done **in** me, so much as by what he has done **for** me. I can find no peace but by resting in the blood of Jesus, his obedience to death, his intercession and fullness of grace; and, so claiming salvation, under him, as my Head, Surety, and Advocate, answer all objections which conscience or Satan interpose, with the apostle's arguments in Romans 8:33-34. Were I to hesitate in this important matter until I feel nothing contrary to that image to which I hope I thirst after, a growing conformity, I might wait forever. I should spend my life in perplexity, and at last should die in terror. But I believe I am already justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus.

That the Lord may be your Guide and Comforter, is the sincere prayer of, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 11

July 30, 1776

My dear sir,

As you agree with me in the main points of what I offered in my last letter, I should think myself to blame, to weary you with dialog on the single article of **perseverance**. Though I believe this sentiment to be true, I am persuaded a man may warmly fight for it, and yet himself fall short! And I trust you will attain the end of your hope, even the salvation of your soul, though you should continue to differ with me in judgment upon this head. I shall only say, The belief of it is essential to my peace. I cannot take upon me to judge of the hearts and feelings of others; but, from the knowledge I have of my own, I am reduced by necessity to take refuge in a hope which, through mercy, I find strongly encouraged in the Scripture: that Jesus, to whom I have been led to commit myself, has engaged to save me, absolutely, and from first to last. He has promised not only that He will not depart from me—but that He will put, keep, and maintain His fear in my heart, so that I shall never finally depart from Him! And if He does not do this for me—I have no security against my turning apostate! For I am so weak, inconsistent, and sinful; I am so encompassed with snares; and I am so liable to such assaults from the subtlety, vigilance, and power of Satan—that, unless I am "kept by the power of God," I am sure I cannot endure to the end!

I do believe that the Lord will keep me while I walk humbly and obediently before Him; but, were this all—it would be cold comfort! I am prone to wander—and need a Shepherd whose watchful eye, compassionate heart, and boundless mercy—will pity, pardon, and restore my backslidings!

For, though by His goodness and not my own, I have hitherto been preserved in the path of holiness; yet I feel those evils within me, which would shortly break loose and bear me down to destruction, were He not ever present with me to control them.

Those who comfortably hope to see His face in glory—but depend upon their own watchfulness and endeavors to preserve themselves from falling, must be much wiser, better, and stronger than I am! Or at least they cannot have so deep and painful a sense of their own weakness and vileness, as daily experience forces upon me. I desire to be found in the use of the Lord's appointed means for the renewal of my spiritual strength—but I dare not undertake to watch a single hour, nor do I find ability to think a good thought, nor a power in myself of resisting any temptation! My strength is perfect weakness—and all I have is sin.

In short, I must sit down in despair, if I did not believe that He who has begun a good work in me, will carry it out to completion.

Had I the pleasure of conversing with you, I think I could state the texts you quote, in a light quite consistent with a hundred other texts which appear to me to assert the final perseverance of the saints in the strongest terms—but it would take up too much room in a letter.

Volumes of controversy, as you observe, have been written upon these subjects—but *no man can receive to his comfort and edification, any gospel truth, unless it be taught and given to him from God*. I do not think my sentiments would add to your *safety*—but I believe they would to your *comfort*; but not if you received them as *my* sentiments—there is no more life and comfort in the knowledge of a gospel truth—than in the knowledge of a proposition in Euclid, unless we are taught it by the Lord himself. I therefore dismiss the subject by referring you to Phi. 3:14-15.

I must begin my next paragraph with an apology, with entreating your candid construction, and assuring you that nothing but a sense of duty towards the Lord, and friendship for you, would put me upon what (if I had not these motives to plead) might be deemed highly bothersome and brash.

I have heard you speak of living in _____. Your situation in college confines you much from it; and, now years and infirmities are growing upon you, it is probable you will not be able to visit it so often as formerly, nor to do what you wish to do, when you are there. Will you excuse me asking you how your are supported? Perhaps I only give you the opportunity of affording me pleasure by telling me, that you have taken care to provide them with a faithful curate, who have your views of the gospel, though not mine, and, with a zeal for God and a warm desire of usefulness to souls, are laboring to impress your people with a sense of divine things, to warn them of the evil of sin, and to invite them to seek Jesus and his salvation. I would be ready to take it for granted this is the case, only that I think such a minister would be noticed and talked of in that part of the country, as we hear no more or less of the effects of the gospel when it is preached throughout the kingdom; and nothing of the kind has yet reached my ears from _____. If it should be otherwise, permit me to hint, that, though you are past the ability of laboring much among your people personally—yet, if the Lord prolongs your life, you have a probability of being greatly useful in a secondary way, by affording your sanction and appointment to a proper man who would feed and watch over your flock. And I hope the Lord committed that place to your charge in his providence, that the people there might in his time have the Word of life preached to them; and, if they heard it thankfully and improved it, I am sure it would add much to your comfort. I shall not enlarge—but rather conclude as I began, with entreating you to excuse my freedom. Indeed, I ought not to suspect

you will be displeased with me for it, after the proofs you have given me of your candor and kindness. Yet I shall be glad to be assured from yourself, that you take it as I mean it.

I am, dear sir, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 12

December 5, 1778

My dear sir,

The kind and affectionate terms in which you write, coming from a person whom I so greatly love and respect, cannot but be highly pleasing to me. I am glad to find likewise, that what you say of yourself, that the Lord favors you with patience and resignation to his will under those *infirmities* which you find increasing as you advance in years; and that your hope for time and eternity is in Jesus, the Friend of sinners.

But I must confess, that, though the former part of your letter gave me great pleasure, the latter part gave me no small pain. It appears, to my grief, that, during the intermission of our correspondence, the difference between us in *sentiment* is considerably increased. You ask me, however, to open my mind to you freely, and the love I bear you constrains me to avail myself of the liberty you allow me—yet I feel a difficulty in the attempt. After the many letters we have exchanged, I hope it is needless to tell you that *I am not fond of controversy!* I have no desire to prescribe my judgment in every point of doctrine—as a standard to others; yet a regard to the truth, as well as to you, obliges me to offer something upon the present occasion. But I hope the Lord will not permit me to drop a single expression unsuitable to the deference I owe to your character and age.

You state two points as fundamental truths of the Christian religion; the first of which, I apprehend, is so far from deserving the title of a *fundamental* truth, that it is utterly repugnant to the design and genius of the gospel, and inconsistent with the tenor of divine revelation both in the Old and New Testament. And, however you may think it supported by a few detached texts, I am persuaded you would never have drawn it yourself from a careful perusal of the Scripture; namely, "That our *righteousness* is as truly and properly derived *into us* by a spiritual birth from the second Adam, as our corruption by a natural birth from the first."

Our sanctification indeed is so—but righteousness and sanctification are by no means *synonymous* terms in the language of Scripture; otherwise the apostle, when he says, Jesus is appointed to us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, would be guilty of gross tautology. The Scripture declares we are all by nature, and, until partakers of the faith which is the gift and operation of God—spiritually dead. And this in a two-fold sense—dead in law, for he who believes not is condemned already; and dead in trespasses and sins. Christ is our life in both these senses. By his atonement he delivers those who believe in him from the *curse of the law*; by his whole obedience, including all he did and suffered, (for his death was an act of obedience,) he cleanses and justifies them from all *guilt* and *penalty*. And, as the spring and pattern of their sanctification by the power of his Holy Spirit, he forms them anew, communicates to them and maintains in them a principle of spiritual life, and teaches them and enables them to love and walk in his footsteps, and to copy his example in their tempers and conduct.

But this their *personal obedience*, the fruit of that holy principle which he has implanted in them, is too imperfect and defiled to constitute their righteousness; it will not answer the strict demands

of that law under which our nature is constituted. So far, indeed, from bearing the examination of that God who is glorious in holiness, they can find innumerable flaws and evils in it themselves. And, therefore, no one who is really enlightened to understand the purity, strictness, and unchangeableness of the law; and the holiness, justice, and truth of the God with whom we have to do—can possibly have any abiding peace of conscience, or assurance of salvation, until he is weaned from grounding his acceptance, either in whole or in part, upon what Christ has done *in* him, and taught to rest it wholly upon what he did *for* him when he obeyed the law on the behalf of man, and was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Though the scheme of the Quakers as set forth with some supposed improvements by Mr. Law, is in your view very amiable, to me it appears much otherwise. I cannot think it either honorable to God, or safe for man. I apprehend it was invented to relieve the mind of some who would be wise, under the prejudices and vain reasoning which arise against the express and reiterated declarations of God's sovereignty in the great business of salvation with which the Scriptures abound. I am often reminded of Job's question, "Shall mortal man be more just than God?" Poor mortal worms, who are unable to account for the most obvious appearances around them, are afraid that the Judge of all the earth will not act right, if he should act as he has solemnly assured us he will; and therefore hypotheses are framed, salvos provided and scriptures are *strained*—to account for his conduct in a way more suited to our limited apprehensions.

For I allow, in some respects, and upon a superficial view, that Mr. Law's scheme may appear more agreeable to what we call *reason* and the *fitness* of things than Paul's. But this to me is an argument

against it, rather than for it. The Lord tells me, in his Word, that his thoughts and ways are as far above mine as the heavens are higher than the earth. And, if I did not find many things in the Bible proposed rather to my *faith*, than to my *reason*—I could not receive it as a revelation from God, because it would lack the grand characteristic impressions of his majesty, and what the apostle calls the "unsearchable and untraceable of his counsels and proceedings." And, after all, the proposed relief is only to the imagination; for, in defiance of hypothesis, these things will remain certain from Scripture, experience, and observation:

First, That a great part of mankind, perhaps the far greatest part of those who have lived hitherto, will be found at the left hand of the Judge in the last day.

Secondly, That a multitude of those who are saved, were for a course of time as obstinately bent upon sin, and did as obstinately resist the call of God's Spirit to their hearts, as those who perish.

Thirdly, That the means of grace which the Scripture declares necessary to salvation, Romans 10:13-14, have been hitherto confined to a small part of the human race. I know indeed, in order to evade this, it is supposed, from a misunderstanding of Peter's words, Act. 10:34, that men in all nations may be saved in their several dispensations, without any knowledge of Jesus or his Word; and accordingly Mr. ___ gives us Gentilism, that is idolatry, as one kind of dispensation of the gospel. *Alas! what may not even well-meaning men be driven to, when they leave the good Word of God, the fountain of living waters, to defend the broken, corrupt cisterns of men's inventions!* Indeed, I am grieved at these bold assertions; it is but saying that men may be saved without either faith, love, or obedience.

I do not wonder, my dear sir, that, though you are persuaded God will not fail on his part and forsake you first—yet you have sensible fears and apprehensions lest you should forsake him. The knowledge you have of your own weakness, must make your system very uncomfortable; while it leaves your final salvation to depend (as you express it) entirely upon yourself. Nay, I must add, that either your heart is better than mine, or at least that you are not equally sensible of its vileness—or your fears would be entirely insupportable; or else, which I rather think is the case, the former part of your letter, wherein you speak so highly of the throne of grace, and confess so plainly that without the grace of Christ you can do nothing, is your experience, and the real feeling and working of your heart—while the latter part, wherein you approve the plan which leaves sinners to depend entirely upon themselves, is but an opinion, which has been plausibly obtruded upon you, and which you find at times very unfavorable to your peace. It must, it will be so.

The admission of a mixed gospel, which indeed is no gospel at all, will bring disquiet into the conscience. If you think you are in the same circumstances, as to choice and power, as Adam was, I cannot blame you for fearing lest you should acquit yourself no better than he did. Ah! my dear sir, Jesus came not only that we might have the life which sin had forfeited, restored unto us—but that we might have it more abundantly; the privileges greater, and the tenure more secure—for now our life is not in our own keeping—but is hid with Christ in God. He undertakes to do all *for* us, *in* us, and *by* us—and he claims the praise and honor of the whole, and is determined to save us in such a way as shall stain the pride of all human glory, that he who glories—may glory in the Lord.

I long to see you disentangled from the scheme you seem to have adopted, because I long to see you happy and comfortable. It is good

to have our hope fixed upon a rock, for we know not what storms and floods may come to shake it. I have no doubt but your soul rests upon the right foundation—but you have incautiously admitted wood, hay, and stubble into your edifice, which will not stand the fiery trial of temptation. I would no more venture my soul upon the scheme which you commend, than I would venture my body for a voyage to the East Indies in a London row boat!

I know you too well to suppose you will be offended with my freedom. However, in a point of such importance, I dare not in conscience disguise or suppress my sentiments. May the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, guide us both into the paths of peace and truth.

I am, dear sir, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 13

June 5, 1779

My dear sir,

Though I love to write to you—I am not willing to take up your time with *controversy*. We see, or think we see, some points of importance in a different light. And where our sentiments differ, I think I have the advantage of you, or I would, of course, accede to yours. But I am ashamed to insist upon *notional* differences with a person from whom, as to the spirit and influence of those things wherein we agree, I ought to be glad to learn. The humility, meekness, and spirituality which your letters breathe, sufficiently evince that you are taught of God; and wherein we are otherwise minded, I trust he will, in his due time, reveal to us both what may be for his glory and our comfort to know distinctly.

I cannot retract the judgment I passed upon Mr. Law's scheme; but I was then, and still am persuaded, that, notwithstanding your favorable opinion of that author, his scheme is not properly yours. If you fully entered into the spirit of his writings, you would soon be weary of my correspondence. I believe, indeed, your acquaintance with his writings has led you something about, and exposed you to embarrassments which would not have troubled you, if, with that humble spirit which the Lord has given you, you had confined your researches more to his holy *Word*, and paid less regard to the dictates and assertions of *men*; and I believe if we could all be freed from an undue attachment to *great names and favorite authors*, and apply ourselves more diligently to draw the water of life from the *pure fountain of the Scripture*, our progress in divine knowledge would be more speedy and more certain.

I am ready to think that much of the difference between us, may be in the *modes of expression* we use. If you mean no more by what you advance—than that every justified person is also regenerate and sanctified, and that no supposed acknowledgment of the death and atonement of Christ is available without a new birth in the soul, and the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit—there remains little to dispute about, for surely I mean no less than this. Yet still it appears to me necessary, for our comfort, when we know what is in our hearts, and necessary likewise to give the Redeemer the glory due to his name, that we be sensible that *our sanctification* is not the *cause*—but the *effect*, of our acceptance with God.

I conceive that by nature we are all in a state of condemnation; that, when we are by the Holy Spirit convinced of this, the first saving gift we receive from God is *faith*, enabling us to put our trust in Jesus for a free pardon, and a gratuitous admission into the family of God's children; that those who receive this precious faith, are thereby

savingly interested in all the promises respecting grace and glory. They resign and devote themselves to the Savior; he receives and accepts them, takes possession of them, and engages to care and provide for them, to mortify the principle of sin in their hearts, to carry on the work he has begun, and to save them to the uttermost. But the precise reason why they are saved, is not because *they are changed*—but simply and solely because He lived and died for them, paid the ransom, and made the atonement on their behalf. This is their plea and hope when they first come to him, John 3:14-15, when they have finished their course upon earth, 2 Timothy 1:12, and when they appear in judgment! Romans 8:34.

If you mean by a rigid Calvinist, one who is fierce, dogmatic, and censorious, and ready to deal out anathemas against all who differ from him—I hope I am no more such a one than I am a rigid Papist! But, as to the doctrines which are now stigmatized by the name of *Calvinism*, I cannot well avoid the epithet *rigid*, while I believe them—for there seems to be no medium between holding them and not holding them; between ascribing salvation to the will of man, or the power of God; between grace and works, Romans 11:6; between being found in the righteousness of Christ, or in my own, Phi. 3:9. Did the harsh consequences often charged upon the doctrine called Calvinistic really belong to it, I would have much to answer for if I had invented it myself, or taken it upon trust from Calvin; but, as I find it in the Scriptures, I cheerfully embrace it, and leave it to the Lord to vindicate his own truths and his own ways, from all the imputations which have been cast upon them.

I am, dear sir, your affectionate and obliged.

Letter 14

September 1, 1779

My dear sir,

Methinks my late publication comes in good time to terminate our friendly debate. As you approve of the hymns, which, taken altogether, contain a full declaration of my *Christian sentiments*, it should seem we are nearly of a mind. If we agree in rhyme, our apparent differences in prose must, I think, be merely verbal, and cannot be very important. And, as to Mr. Law, if you can read his books to your edification and comfort, (which I own, with respect to some important points in his scheme, I cannot,) why should I wish to tear them from you? I have formerly been a great admirer of Mr. Law myself, and still think that he is a first-rate genius, and that there are many striking passages in his writings deserving attention and admiration. But I feel myself a transgressor, a sinner—I feel the need of an atonement, of something to be done *for* me, as well as *in* me. If I was this moment filled by the mighty power of God with the Spirit of sanctification in a higher degree than Mr. Law ever conceived; if I was this moment as perfectly holy as the angels before the throne, still I should lack security with respect to what is past. Hitherto I have been a sinner, a transgressor of that holy law which says, "The soul that sins—it shall die." Therefore I need an atonement in the proper sense of the word; some consideration of sufficient importance to satisfy me that the holy and just Governor of the world can, consistently with the perfections of his nature, the honor of his truth, and the righteous tenor of his moral government—pardon and receive such a sinner as I am. And, without some persuasion of this sort, I believe the supposition I have made to be utterly impossible, and the least degree of true holiness utterly unattainable.

The essence of that holiness I thirst after, I conceive to be love and devotedness to God—but how can I love him until I have a hope that

his anger is turned away from me, or at least until I can see a solid foundation for that hope? Here Mr. Law's scheme fails me—but the gospel gives me relief. When I think of the obedience unto death of Jesus Christ in my nature, as a public person, and in behalf of sinners, then I see the law, which *I* could not obey—completely fulfilled by *him*; and the penalty which I had incurred sustained by him. I see him in proportion to the degree of faith in him, bearing my sins in his own body upon the tree; I see God well pleased in him—and for his sake freely justifying the ungodly. This sight saves me from guilt and fear, removes the obstacles which stood in my way, emboldens my access to the throne of grace, for the influences of his Holy Spirit to subdue my sins, and to make me conformable to my Savior.

But my hope not is built—upon what *I* feel in myself—but upon what *he* felt for me; not upon what *I* can ever do for him—but upon what has been done by *him* upon my account. It appears to me befitting the wisdom of God to take such a method of showing his mercy to sinners, as should convince the world, the universe, angels, and men—that his inflexible displeasure against sin, and his regard to the demands of his truth and holiness, must at the same time be equally displayed. This was effected by bruising his own Son, filling him with agonies, and delivering him up to death and the curse of the law, when he appeared as a surety for sinners.

It appears to me, therefore, that, though the blessings of *justification* and *sanctification* are always joined together, and cannot be separated in the same subject, a believing sinner—yet they are in themselves as distinct and different as any two things can well be. The one, like life itself, is instantaneous and perfect at once, and takes place the moment the soul is born of God; the other, like the effects of life, growth, and strength, is imperfect and gradual. The

child born today, though weak, and very different from what it will be when its faculties open, and its stature increases, is as truly, and as much, alive as it will ever be; and, if an heir to an estate or a kingdom, has the same right now as it will have when it becomes of age, because this right is derived not from its abilities or stature—but from its birth and parents. The weakest believer is born of God, and an heir of glory; and the strongest and most advanced believer, can be no more.

I remain, my dear sir, your most obedient servant.

Five Letters to a Young Lady

Letter 1

August, 1772.

My dear Miss,

The Lord brought us home in peace. My visit to **** was agreeable, and I shall often think of it with pleasure; though the deadness and dryness of my own spirit, a good part of the time I was there, proved a considerable abatement. I am eager enough to converse with the Lord's people—when at the same time I am backward and indisposed to communion with the Lord himself!

The two evils charged upon Israel of old—a proneness to forsake the fountain of living waters, and to trust to broken cisterns (which can do me no good unless he supplies them), run through the whole of my experience abroad and at home. A few drops of grace in my *fellow-worms* endear them to me exceedingly. If I expect to see any Christian *friends*, I count the hours until we meet. I promise myself great benefit—but if the *Lord* withdraws his influence—the best of them prove to me but clouds without water.

It was not, however, wholly so with me all the time I stayed with my friends—but I am slow in learning to depend upon the Lord alone. I have been at this lesson many a long year—but am so poor and dull a scholar, that I have not yet made any tolerable progress in it.

I received some instruction where I little expected it, at *Mr. Cox's Museum*. The efforts of his ingenuity amazed me—while at the same time I was struck with their insignificance. His fine things were curious beyond all I had any idea of; and yet what are they better than *toys* and *amusements*, suited to the taste of children! And

notwithstanding the variety of their motions, they were all *destitute of life*. There is unspeakably more wisdom and skill in the mechanism of a butterfly or a bee which flies unnoticed in the fields—than in all his fancy apparatus put together! But the *works of God* are disregarded, while the feeble imitations of them which men can produce gain universal applause!

If you and I could make *self-moving lions and elephants*, what would it profit us? Blessed be God, that he has given us some glimpses of his wisdom and love! by which our hearts, more hard and lifeless by nature than the stones in the street—are constrained and enabled to move upwards, and to seek after the Lord. He has given us in his *Word* a greater treasure than all that we ever beheld with our eyes, and a hope which shall flourish when the earth and all its works shall be burnt up! What will all the fine things of men's devising be worth in that day?

I think the passage you refer to in Mr. **** justly exceptionable. His intention is good, and the mistake he would censure very dangerous—but he might have explained himself more clearly. I apprehend he and you do not mean the same thing by *being in the dark*. It is not an *uncomfortable*—but a *careless* frame, which he would censure. Those who walk in darkness and see no light, and yet are exhorted to stay themselves upon God, (Isaiah 1:10), are said to hearken to the voice of his servant. Though they cannot *see* the Lord, they are *seeking* and *mourning* after him, and waiting in the use of means, and warring against sin. Mr. **** had another set of people in view, who trust in the *notions* of Gospel truth, or some *past* convictions and comforts; though at present they give no evidence of spiritual desires—but are worldly in their spirit and conversation. They talk of trusting in the Lord; account it a weakness to doubt of their state, and think all is well, because they profess to believe the doctrines of

grace. In a word, it is the *darkness of sin and sloth*, not the occasional darkness of an exercised soul, against which his observation is pointed. Or if, indeed, he meant more than this, we are not obliged to believe him.

Remember your exalted privilege—you have the Bible in your hands, and are not bound to follow *books* or *preachers* any farther than what they teach agrees with the Oracles of Truth. We have great reason to be thankful for the instructions and writings of spiritual men—but they are all fallible—even as ourselves. One is our master, even Christ—what he says, we are to receive implicitly—but we do not owe implicit subjection to the best of our fellow-creatures. The *Bereans* were *commended* because they would not implicitly believe even the Apostle Paul—but searched the Scriptures to see whether the things which he taught were true. May the Lord give us a spirit of humility and discernment in all things.

Letter 2

May 4, 1773.

My dear Miss,

Methinks it is high time to ask you how you do, to thank you for your last letter, and to let you know, that though necessity makes me slack in writing—yet I can and do often think of you. My silence has been sometimes owing to lack of spare time; and sometimes when I could have found leisure, my *harp* has been out of tune, and I had no heart to write. Perhaps you are ready to infer, by my sitting down to write at last, that my *harp* is now well tuned, and I have something *extraordinary* to offer—beware of thinking so, lest you should be sadly disappointed. Should I make myself the subject, I could give you at present but a *mournful ditty*.

I suppose you have heard *I have been ill*—through mercy, I am now well. But indeed I must farther tell you, that when I was sick—I was well! And since the Lord has removed my illness—I have been much worse. My illness was far from violent in itself, and was greatly sweetened by a calm submissive frame the Lord gave me under it. My heart seemed more alive to him then than it has done since my cough, fever, and deafness have been removed.

Shall I tell you another bit of a riddle? That, notwithstanding the many spiritual fluctuations which I pass through—I am always the same! This is the very truth: "In me, that is, in my flesh—dwells no good thing!"

So that if sometimes my spirit is in a measure humble, lively and holy—it is not that I have grown better than I was—but the Lord is pleased to put forth His gracious power in my weakness!

And when my heart is dry and stupid, when I can find no pleasure in waiting upon God—it is not because I am worse than I was before—but only because the Lord sees it best that I should feel—what a poor creature I am.

My heart was once like a dungeon, beyond the reach of the sun, and always dark. Yet the Lord by His grace has been pleased to make this dungeon into a room, by putting windows in it. But I need not tell you, that though windows will transmit the light into a room, they cannot supply the lack of light. When the day is gone—the windows are of little use. When the day returns, the room is enlightened by them again. Thus, unless the Lord shines, I cannot retain today—the light I had yesterday! And though His presence makes a delightful difference, I have no more to boast of in myself at one time than another. When He is with me—all goes on pleasantly. When He withdraws—I find I can do nothing without Him.

I need not wonder that I find it so; for it must be so of course, if I am what I confess myself to be—a poor, helpless, sinful creature in myself. Nor need I be over-much discouraged, since the Lord has promised to help those who can do nothing without Him—and not those who can make a tolerable shift to help themselves.

In His great mercy, He does not so totally withdraw, as to leave me without any power or will to cry for His return. I hope He maintains in me at all times—a desire for His presence. Yet it befits me to wait for Him with patience, and to live upon His faithfulness, when I can feel nothing but evil in myself.

In your letter, after having complained of your inability, you say you converse with many who find it otherwise, who can go whenever they will to the Father of mercies with a child-like confidence, and never return without an answer—an answer of peace. If they only mean that they are favored with an established faith, and can see that the Lord is always the same, and that their right to the blessings of the covenant is not at all affected by their unworthiness, I wish you and I had more experience of the same privilege. In general, the Lord helps me to *aim* at it—though I find it sometimes difficult to *hold fast* my confidence. But if they speak *absolutely* with respect to their spiritual frames, that they not only have something to support them under their changes—but meet with *no changes* that require such support—I must say it is well that they do not live here; if they did, they would not know how to pity us, and we would not know how to understand them!

We have an enemy here—that fights against our peace, and I know not one among us but often groans under the warfare. I advise you not to be troubled by what you hear of *other folk's experience*—but keep close to the written Word, where you will meet with much to

encourage you, though you often feel yourself weary and heavy-laden. For my own part, I like that path best which is well beaten by the footsteps of the flock, though it is not always pleasant and strewn with flowers. In our way we find some hills, from whence we can cheerfully look about us—but we meet with deep valleys likewise, and seldom travel long upon even ground.

Letter 3

1775.

My dear Miss,

I am satisfied with your answer to my question. we are not proper judges of each other's circumstances; and I am in some measure weaned from *judging hastily*—that what would not be good for *me*—must therefore necessarily be wrong for another. However, my solicitude for your welfare made me venture to drop a hint, as I was persuaded you would take it in good part. Indeed all situations and circumstances (supposing them not sinful in themselves, and that we are lawfully placed in them) are nearly alike.

How often, when I am what I call alone—may my mind be compared to a puppet-show, a fair, a bazaar, or any of those scenes where folly, noise and wickedness most abound? On the contrary, sometimes I have enjoyed sweet recollection and composure where I would have hardly expected it. But still, though the power be all of the Lord, (and we of ourselves can do nothing), it is both our duty and our wisdom to be attentive to the use of appointed means on the one hand, and, on the other, watchful against those things which we find by experience have a tendency to damp our fervor, or to dissipate our spirits.

A comfortable intimacy with a fellow-worm cannot be maintained without a certain discretion and caution, a studiousness in improving opportunities of pleasing, and in avoiding what is known to be offensive. For though love will make large allowances for involuntary mistakes, it cannot easily brook a deliberate slight. We act thus as it were by instinct towards those whom we dearly love, and to whom we feel ourselves greatly obliged. And happy are they who are most influenced by this sentiment in their walk before the Lord.

But, alas! here we are chargeable with such inconsistencies, as we would be greatly ashamed of in common life. It is well for us, that His thoughts and ways are above ours—and that He is infinite in mercy as well as in power! For surely, our dearest friends would have been weary of us, and have renounced us long ago—had we behaved towards them as we have too often done towards Him! Yet, being infinite in patience, He remains gracious to us—though we have too often trifled with Him! Surely we may well say with the prophet, "Who is a God like unto You—who pardons iniquity!" His tenderness and forbearance towards His own people (whose sins, being committed against His love and mercy, are more aggravated than others) is astonishing indeed! But, oh! may the times past suffice to have grieved Him; and may we be enabled from henceforth to serve Him with a single eye and a simple heart, to be faithful to every intimation of His will, and to make Him our All in all!

Mr. **** has been here, and I have been with him at **** since his return. We seem glad to be together when we can. When I am with him, I feel quite at home and at ease, and can tell him (so far as I dare tell a creature) all that is in my heart; a plain proof, that union of spirit depends no more upon an exact uniformity of *sentiment*, than on a uniformity of *prayers*. For in some points of doctrine we differ considerably—but I trust I agree with him in the views I have

of the excellency, suitableness, and sufficiency of the Savior, and of his right to reign without a rival in the hearts of his redeemed people.

An experimental knowledge of Jesus, as the deliverer from sin and wrath, and the author of eternal life and salvation to all who are enabled to believe—is a sufficient ground for union of heart. In this point, all who are taught of God are of one mind. But an eager fighting for or against those points which are usually made the subjects of controversy, tends to nourish pride and evil tempers in ourselves, and to alienate our hearts from those we hope to spend an eternity with. In heaven we shall neither be Dissenters, Moravians, nor Methodists; neither Calvinists nor Arminians—but followers of the Lamb, and children of the kingdom. There we shall hear the voice of controversy no more.

We are still favored with health and many temporal blessings. My *spiritual* walk is not so smooth as my *outward* path. In *public*, I am mercifully supported; but in *secret*, I most sensibly feel my own vileness and weakness—and through all, the Lord is gracious.

Letter 4

January 10, 1775.

My dear Miss,

There is hardly anything in which the Lord permits me to meet with more disappointment, than in the advantage I am ready to promise myself from *creature-converse*. When I expect to meet any of my Christian friends, my thoughts usually travel much faster than my body. I anticipate the hour of meeting, and my imagination is warmed with expectation of what I shall say, and what I shall hear; and sometimes I have had seasons for which I ought to be more thankful than I am. It is pleasant indeed when the Lord favors us

with a happy hour, and is pleased to cause our hearts to burn within us while we are speaking of his goodness. But often it is far otherwise with me, I carry with me a *dissipation* of spirit, and find that I can neither impart nor receive blessing. Something from within or from without crosses my schemes, and when I retire I seem to have gained nothing but a fresh conviction, that we can neither help nor be helped—unless the Lord himself is pleased to help us. With his presence in our hearts, we might be comfortable and happy if shut up in one of the cells of a prison—without it, the most select company, the most desirable opportunities, prove but clouds without water!

I have sometimes thought of asking you, whether you find that difference between being abroad and at home that I do? But I take it for granted that you do not; your connections and intimacies are, I believe, chiefly with those who are highly favored of the Lord, and if you can break through or be upon your guard against the inconveniences which attend frequent changes and much company—you must be very happy in them. But I believe, considering my weakness, the Lord has chosen wisely and well for me, in placing me in a state of retirement, and not putting it in my power, were it ever so much my inclination, to be often abroad. As I stir so seldom, I believe when I do—that it is not, upon the whole, to my disadvantage; for I meet with something more or less upon which my reflections afterwards may, by his blessing, be useful to me; though at the time my visits most frequently convince me how little *wisdom* or *skill* I have in improving time and opportunities.

But were I to live in London, I know not what might be the consequence. Indeed I need not puzzle myself about it, as my call does not lie there—but I pity and pray for those who do live there; and I admire such of them as, in those circumstances which appear so formidable to me, are enabled to walk simply, humbly, and closely

with the Lord. They remind me of Daniel, unhurt in the midst of lions; or of the bush which Moses saw, surrounded with flames—yet not consumed, because the Lord was there. Some such I do know, and I hope you are one of the number.

This is certain—that if the light of God's countenance, and communion with him in love, afford the greatest happiness we are capable of—then whatever tends to indispose us for this pursuit, or to draw a veil between him and our souls—must be our great loss. If we walk with him, it must be in the path of duty, which lies plain before us when our eye is single; and we are waiting with attention upon his Word, Spirit, and providence. Now, wherever the path of duty leads—we are safe; and it often does lead and place us in such circumstances as no other consideration would make us choose. We were not designed to be mere *recluses*—but have all a part to act in life. Now, if I find myself in the midst of things disagreeable enough in themselves to the spiritual life—yet if, when the question occurs, *What are you doing here?* my heart can answer, *I am here by the will of God*; I believe it to be, all things considered, my duty to be here at this time, rather than elsewhere.

If, I say, I am tolerably satisfied of this, then I would not burden and grieve myself about what I cannot *avoid* or *alter*—but endeavor to take all such things up with cheerfulness, as a part of my daily cross; since I am called, not only to do the will of God—but to suffer it—but if I am doing my own will—rather than his, then I have reason to fear, lest I should meet with either a *snare* or a *sting* at every step! May the Lord Jesus be with you!

Letter 5

April 13, 1776.

Dear Madam,

I am of the last to present my congratulations to you and Mr. **** on your marriage—but I have not been unmindful of you. My heart has repeatedly wished you all that my pen can express, that the new relation in which the providence of God has placed you may be blessed to you in every respect, may afford you much temporal comfort, promote your spiritual progress, and enlarge your sphere of usefulness in the world and in the church.

By this time I suppose visits and ceremonies are pretty well over, and you are beginning to be settled in your new situation. What an important period is a wedding-day! What an entire change of circumstances does it produce! What an influence it has upon every day of future life! How many cares, inquietudes, and trials, does it expose us to, which we might otherwise have avoided! But those who love the Lord, and are guided by his Word and providence, have nothing to fear; for in every state, relation, and circumstance in life—he will be with them, and will surely do them good. His grace, which is needful in a single life—is sufficient for a married, life. I sincerely wish you and your husband much happiness together; that you may be mutually helpers, and assist each other in walking as fellow-heirs of the hope of eternal life. Your cares and *trials* I know must be increased; may your *comforts* be increased proportionally! They will be so, if you are enabled heartily and simply to entreat the Lord to keep your heart fixed near to himself.

All the *temporal* blessings which God provides to sweeten life, and make our passage through this wilderness more agreeable, will fail and disappoint us, and produce us more *thorns* than *roses*—unless we can keep sight of *his hand* in bestowing them, and hold and use the gifts in some due subserviency to what we owe to the Giver. But, alas! we are poor creatures, prone to wander, prone to admire our

gourds, cleave to our cisterns, and think of building tabernacles, and taking our rest in this polluted world! Hence the Lord often sees it necessary, in mercy to his children, to embitter their sweets, to break their cisterns, send a worm into their gourds, and draw a dark cloud over their pleasing prospects. His Word tells us, that all here below is vanity, compared with the light of his countenance; and if we cannot or will not believe it upon the authority of his Word, we must learn it by painful experience.

May he enable you to settle it in your hearts, that creature-comforts are precarious, insufficient, and ensnaring; that all good comes from his hand, and that nothing can do us good—but so far as he is pleased to make it the instrument of communicating, as a stream, that goodness which is in him as a fountain. Even the bread which we eat, without the influence of his blessing, would no more support us than a stone! But his blessing makes everything good, gives a tenfold value to our comforts, and greatly diminishes the weight of every cross.

The ring upon your finger is of some value as gold—but this is not much. What makes it chiefly valuable to you is, that you consider it as a pledge and token of the relation you bear to him who gave it to you. I know no fitter emblem of the light in which we should consider all those good things which the Lord gives us richly to enjoy. When everything we receive from him is received and prized as a fruit and pledge of his covenant-love; then his bounties, instead of being set up as rivals, and idols to draw our hearts from him—awaken us to fresh exercises of gratitude, and furnish us with fresh motives of cheerful obedience every hour.

Time is short, and we live in a dark and cloudy day, when iniquity abounds, the love of many waxes cold; and we have reason to fear the

Lord's hand is lifted up in displeasure at our provocations. May he help us to set loose all below, and to be found watching unto prayer—for grace to keep our garments undefiled, and to be faithful witnesses for him in our places! O! it is my desire for myself and for all my dear friends, that while too many seem content with mere profession, a mere name to live, and an outward attachment to ordinances and sentiments and parties—we may be ambitious to experience what the glorious Gospel is capable of effecting, both as to *sanctification* and *consolation*, in this state of infirmity; that we may have our loins girded up, our lamps burning, and, by our simplicity and spirituality, constrain those who know us—to acknowledge that we have been with Jesus, have sat at his feet, and drank of his spirit!

Eighteen Letters to Several Friends

Letter 1

To Miss M****.

September 10, 1760

Dear Madam,

I address my letter to you, but consider myself as writing to the whole of the little society I had the pleasure of meeting at your house, and at Miss K****'s. I still reflect with pleasure on the opportunities I was favored with among you; and if, as I hope, my little visits were not unacceptable to each or any of you, let us not lose a moment in apologies or compliments to each other, but refer the whole praise where it is wholly due.

Salvation, in its whole extent, and in each particular step, is of the Lord. Though we can but lisp a little word about his goodness—yet when he is pleased to be near us, his presence and blessing can work

by the smallest instruments, and cause our hearts to burn within us. On the other hand, when he withdraws, we can no more help each other than we can help ourselves: then, the very best of us prove miserable comforters, fruitless teachers, and blind guides! Could I bring my heart to this point, to regard myself as insufficient to think one good thought, or to speak one profitable word, any further than is influenced by that enlivening Spirit which Jesus is exalted on high to bestow, I would be well; but, alas! I am often hurt by a fond desire of being or doing something considerable, and this, so often as it prevails, like a sudden fatal blast, spoils my fairest blooming prospects of comfort and usefulness.

It is a great point to be constant and diligent in the use of all appointed *means*, and yet to have our souls waiting only upon God, in a deep persuasion that neither the best means, nor the closest attendance upon them, can do anything for us in themselves; and that nothing short of renewed communications from him, can either *satisfy* or *sanctify* our hearts!

The best advice I can send, or the best wish I call form for you, is, that you may have an abiding and experimental sense of those words of the apostle, "LOOKING UNTO JESUS!" The duty, the privilege, the safety, the unspeakable happiness, of a believer, are all comprised in that one sentence!

Let us first pray that the eyes of our understanding may be opened and strengthened; and then let us fix our whole gaze upon Him! But how are we to behold Him? I answer, in the looking-glass of his written Word! There He is represented to us in a variety of views. The wicked world can see no loveliness in the portraiture He has given of Himself; yet, blessed be God, there are those who can "behold His glory as the glory of the only begotten Son of God, full of

grace and truth!" And while they behold it, they find themselves, changed into His image," by the transforming influence of His Spirit.

In vain we use reasonings, and arguments, and resolutions, to beat down our corruptions, and to silence our fears. A believing view of Jesus is the only effectual means!

When heavy trials in life are appointed us, and we are called to give up, or perhaps to pluck out, a right eye—it is an easy matter for another to say, "Be comforted;" but this is totally useless. Only a believing view of Jesus will sustain us! When we can fix our thoughts upon Him, as submitting, for our sakes, to drink our whole bitter cup of the wrath of God to the very dregs; and when we further consider, that He who thus suffered in our nature, who knows and sympathizes with all our weakness, is now the Supreme Disposer of all that concerns us, that He numbers the very hairs of our heads, appoints every trial we meet with in number, weight, and measure, and will allow nothing to befall us but what shall contribute to our real good—this view, I say, is a *medicine suited to every disease*, and powerfully reconciles us unto every affliction.

So when a sense of sin prevails, and the tempter is permitted to assault us with dark and dreadful suggestions, it is easy for us to say, "Do not be afraid;" but those who have tried, well know that looking to Jesus is the only and sure remedy in this case—if we can get a sight of him by faith, as he once hung between the two thieves, and as he now pleads within the veil, then we can defy sin and Satan, and give our challenge in the apostle's words, "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes, rather, who is risen again; who also makes intercession for us!" (Romans 8:34.)

Again, we are afraid of being swallowed up by our many restless enemies; or are weary of our long pilgrimage through such a thorny,

tedious, barren wilderness. A sight of Jesus, as Stephen saw him, crowned with glory—yet noticing all the sufferings of his poor servants, and just ready to receive them to himself, and make them partakers of his everlasting joy—this will raise the spirits, and restore strength; this will animate us to hold on, and to hold out! This will do it, and nothing but this can!

So, if obedience is the thing in question, looking unto Jesus is the object that melts the soul into love and gratitude, and those who greatly love, and are greatly obliged, find obedience easy. When Jesus is upon our thoughts, either in his humbled or his exalted state, either as bleeding on the cross, or as worshiped in our nature by all the host of heaven, then we can ask the apostle's question with a befitting disdain, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. What! Shall I sin against my Lord, my Love, my Friend, who once died for my sins, and now lives and reigns on my behalf; who supports, and leads, and guides, and feeds me every day? God forbid. No! rather I would wish for a thousand hands and eyes, and feet, and tongues, for ten thousand lives—that I might devote them all to His service: he should have all then; and surely he shall have all now! "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith!" Hebrews 12:2

Alas, that in spite of myself, there still remains something that resists his will! But I long and pray for its destruction; and I see a day coming when my wish shall be accomplished, and I shall be wholly and forever the Lord's!

I am your affectionate servant.

Letter 2

To Miss M****.

November 2, 1761

My dear sister,

Your letter was welcome and comfortable. I praise the Lord on your behalf, and shall not cease to pray, that you may be filled with his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may go on to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things; and that a sense of his presence and power, who so loved us as to wash us from our sins in his own blood—may be your establishment, and strength, and comfort continually. You have reason, indeed, to praise him, and so have I. O what a wonder of grace, that he should say to those who were children of wrath, "Behold, I go to my Father—and to your Father; to my God—and to your God." "Henceforth I call you not servants—but friends," and as a proof of it, "Ask what you will—and it shall be done unto you." Here are words sufficient either to raise our souls up to heaven, or to bring heaven down into our souls, according to that glorious promise which to many is fulfilled even in our day. "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:3

Let us not be greatly discouraged at the many tribulations, difficulties, and disappointments which lie in the path which leads to glory. Our Lord has foretold us, that "in this world, you will have many trials and sorrows." Yet he has also made a suitable provision for every case we can meet with; and is himself always near to those that call upon him—as a sure refuge, an almighty strength, a never-failing, ever-present help in every time of trouble! "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. Therefore we

will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas!" Psalm 46:1-2

Seeing likewise that he himself was a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief for our sakes. He drank the whole cup of unmixed wrath for us; shall we then refuse to *taste* of the cup of affliction at his appointment; especially when his wisdom and love prepare it for us, and proportions every circumstance to our strength; when he puts it into our hands, not in anger—but in tender mercy, to do us good, to bring us near to himself; and when he sweetens every bitter draught with those comforts which none but he can give? Let us rather say, None of these things move us, neither do we count anything on this side eternity dear, so that we may finish our course with joy, and run with patience the race which is set before us.

The time is short—and the world is passing away! All its troubles and all its vanities will soon be at an end! In a little while, "we shall see Him as He is!" Every veil will be taken away, every seeming frown will be removed from His face—and every tear wiped away from ours! We shall also be like Him! Even now, when we contemplate His glory as shining in the looking-glass of the Gospel—we feel ourselves, in some measure, transformed into His image! What a sudden, wonderful, and abiding change we shall then experience, when He shall shine directly, immediately, and eternally upon our souls, without one interposing cloud between! We likewise shall shine forth as the sun, in our Savior's brightness! Then shall we sing with understanding those glorious songs, Isaiah 12:1-6, Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 5:9, and Revelation 7:10, without one jarring note, or one wandering thought forever.

"Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit,

perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord!" "Let us lay aside every weight." "Let us not be slothful," but followers of that *cloud of witnesses* who in every age have set their word to the truth and power of God. They were once as we are now—they had their afflictions and their fears, their enemies and temptations; they were exercised with a wicked heart, and a wicked world; and I doubt not but many of them, in a fit of unbelief, have been ready to conclude, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul," but, at length, the "blood of Jesus, and the word of his testimony, made them more than conquerors, and now, their warfare is finished, they are before the throne of God and the Lamb, and shall go no more out." While we are sighing, they are singing; while we are fighting, they are triumphing; but their song, their triumph, their joy, will not be complete, until we are called up to join them. The Lord prepare us for, and hasten, the happy hour.

The strain of your present experience requires you, above all others, to be humble and watchful, and I trust you are so. However, it is our duty to exhort one another daily. One of the greatest contradictions in human nature, and the very strongest proof of our depravity, is, that the communication of extraordinary measures of divine comforts, which in their own nature have a direct tendency to humble—has, through our corruptions, sometimes a contrary effect; not in the present moment, indeed that is impossible—but afterward. Paul himself was liable to danger in this matter, see 2 Corinthians 12:7. You will do well, therefore, to entreat the Lord to give you a double guard on this side, to keep you in continual remembrance what you were by nature, and what you still are in yourselves. We are often forced to learn this hard lesson by bitter experience.

Again, be watchful—many eyes are upon you. *Satan* envies you. Oh! he hates to see any people, especially young people, walking very

closely with God; so far as he is permitted, he will spread snares for your feet every hour! He desires to have you, "that he may sift you as wheat." Farther, the *world* observes you; many would rejoice at your halting; and a little slip in you, would give them more pleasure and advantage in opposing the truth, than a greater slip in some others who are content to plod on in the common way. *Nay, it is well if there are not some even among yourselves, professors and members, who would be glad to see you brought down to a level with themselves—since they cannot persuade themselves to join and imitate you.* These things you know without my telling you, and I do not mention them to discourage you. No, were every leaf upon the trees, and every blade of grass a sworn enemy to our souls, we are safe under the shadow of our great Rock: the blessing is his, and he will not withhold it; but the appointed means are our part, and it is our wisdom and happiness to be found waiting on him in the use of them.

Letter 3

To Miss M****

April 5, 1761

Dear madam,

I desire to praise God on your behalf, and frequently to remember you *both* at the throne of grace; I may say *each* of you, for I understand Miss S**** is now returned to Y—, I consider her as a part of my correspondence. I hope the Lord is with her likewise, and that she can, by sweet experience, set her seal to that comfortable truth—that all things, both shall, and do, work together for the good of those that love God!

Things continue much with us as they were when I wrote last. For myself, I every day have proof that the Lord is gracious, merciful, and kind. I hope my experience in some measure corresponds with yours; I say, in *some measure*; for I think you rather describe what I would *be*—than what I *am*. Blessed be his name for a *taste*, though it be but a taste, of the water of life! I long for fuller draughts, and I trust he has given me that hungering and thirsting after his righteousness, which shall at length be satisfied, and which cannot be satisfied with anything short of his love! Often I cry out, "Oh! remember me with the favor you bear to your own people." I know there are heights and depths in communion with God, to which many of his dear children are admitted, which are far beyond my present attainments. But this rather encourages me than otherwise; for they (even the very best of them) were once as poor as myself; and have nothing now any more than I, that they can call their own. And he who has done so much for them, is rich enough to do as much for me! The fountain of grace, though ever-flowing, is ever full. And as the sun shines as easily and powerfully on ten thousand, as upon a single person—so the Sun of Righteousness can enlighten and comfort all his children with one single glance of his love. I desire to praise his name for what he has already shown me, and to hope in His mercy that I shall yet "see greater things than these."

As I have nothing particular to impart of my own, I shall transcribe part of a letter I lately received from a young woman, a relation of mine, in London. She is not a member of a congregational church—but a hearer of Mr. Jones. She used to make herself merry at my expense—for being what she called a Methodist. After the Lord awakened her, she walked three years in the *valley of the shadow of death*, almost without a glimpse of hope. How it is with her now, I shall give you in her own words. She writes thus, among other things, for I have not time to give you the whole:

"All the glory to himself who is worthy! I find the Lord better to me than all my hopes, and all my fears. Though I am often beset with *temptations* of various kinds, from without as well as from within—yet my gracious Lord gives me to wrestle with him until he gets the better for me, for it is not in me. I know, and blessed be the Lord for teaching me—that I am but a poor, weak, helpless creature—but he strengthens me, and blesses me, and gives me to rejoice in him almost all the day long. Though I have not always love, and joy, and peace alike—yet I have not let him go since I wrote to you last. I can hold him fast, and I pray, and hope, and trust I ever shall. I believe 'my Beloved is mine—and I am his.' From what I have found already, I dare not doubt his love or his power; though, to my shame be it spoken, I too often wander from my God, if not in word or deed—yet, alas, my heart too often betrays me! I find the Lord to be a jealous God, who will not accept of a *divided heart*; and, indeed, if I know anything of myself, it is the whole desire of my soul to give up all and everything, myself, my soul, my body, my health, my strength, my friends, my all—as a willing sacrifice into his hand. I bless my God for such a disposition, and often find the sweetness of it; and I always find that the more watchful I walk, the more comfortable I am."

She then adds: "I believe it is a month since I wrote the above; and thanks and praises to my dear Lord, I have had much of his presence and love in my heart ever since. I find that stupidity and deadness which I have had much of in times past, greatly removed. The Lord has kept my soul so open to prayer, that I can pray and praise all the day long. I never find anything keeps me so low at the throne of grace, as a sense and feeling of the loving-kindness of the Lord to my soul: it makes me nothing, it so empties me of self. It is not a sense of sin without the love of God, -which will humble me; I think that only makes me peevish and dissatisfied. But when the Lord lifts up the light of his countenance upon me, then it is that everything in me

falls low at his foot stool. I have found such power lately as I never had before; I used to be as ready to yield to temptation—as the devil was to tempt! But now (all the glory be to him who gives me this power) I find that word to be faithful and true, 'Resist the devil—and he will flee from you.' When temptation besets me, instead of *reasoning* with the enemy until I lose all the Lord has given me, I flee to Christ, and tell him how it is with me, and cry mightily to him—until he makes me more than conqueror."

I hope this little extract from my cousin's letter will be acceptable. I have several from her in the same strain, for she is not now in what is called the warmth of her first love—but has been walking comfortably in the Lord's way three or four years past; I think, indeed, every letter reveals a growth *upwards* in knowledge and love—and *downwards* in humility! May the Lord enable us so to do.

Letter 4

To Miss K****.

June 1, 1761

Dear Miss K.,

I frequently reflect with pleasure on our little interviews the last year. I trust the Lord was with us in truth. Surely my heart burned within me, and I have, and shall have, much reason to bless the Lord for those sweet and unexpected opportunities. The remembrance of them has exceedingly engaged my heart to you both. I think a sight of the very ground we walked over together, would bring to my mind much of what occurred in our conversation. May the same gracious Lord enable me so to *write*, and you to *read*—that we may experience a fellowship in spirit, and may drink plentifully of the refreshing streams of His love and grace.

It gives me much pleasure to hear that the Lord leads you into the green pastures of his love, so that you are constrained to cry out, "How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty!" May he show you yet greater things than these, and make your soul fresh and flourishing as a tree planted by a continual stream. Then am I sure you will love, and serve, and praise him; you will not be ashamed of his name and cause; you will not be backward to speak for him; you will not find fault with any of His dispensations. In a word, then your life and conversation will be a proof of your heavenly calling, and all who behold you will be constrained to acknowledge that you have been with Jesus indeed!

This is the way, and there is no other, to glorify him in the world. We know, from experience, how little *reading*, and *hearing* and *resolving*—can do for us, when the Lord is absent, and our hearts in a hard and stupid frame. Alas! how can we render to God—unless we first receive from him? But, oh, when His spirit and power is with us, what a delightful surprising charge! then, old things become new, hard things easy; and out of weakness—we are made strong! Then our enemies attempt in vain to bind and ensnare us; he enables us to run through their troops, to leap over their walls, to esteem their darts and swords as *straw*, and to go forth in his strength conquering and to conquer. I hope my letter will find you in this experience, with your bow abiding in force, and your enemies under your feet, and may it long continue. This is a privileged, glorious slate indeed; but it calls for much watchfulness and prayer. The Lord expects a particular closeness and obedience from those whom he thus delights to honor, and Satan watches with envy and rage to find an opening by which to assault such a soul.

I hope you will remember, that all your comfort and prosperity depends upon keeping near to him who is the sun, the shield, the life

of his poor children, and that neither experiences, knowledge, nor attainments, can support us, or maintain themselves, without a continual supply from the fountain. This supply is to be kept up by constant prayer, and prayer will languish without continual watchfulness. I trust you will bear me to put you in mind of these things, though you know them. We are yet in an enemy's country, and are directed to exhort one another daily, lest we be surprised by some stratagem and scheme of our bitter adversary, who has many thousand snares and instruments to employ against us, and well knows how to use them to the most advantage, and to avail himself of our weak side. Yet we need not fear him, if we take, and keep, and use, the whole armor of God, and remain under the shadow of that Rock which is higher than ourselves.

As to me, the Lord deals gently with me—my trials are few and not heavy; my experiences run in a kind of even thread; I have no great spiritual enlargements, and am seldom left to great darkness and temptations. I am often wandering away—but the Lord seeks me out, and brings me back from time to time, much sooner than I could expect. I am enabled, through grace, to keep myself from the evil of the world, so that I have not been left to bring a blot on my profession. But, alas! my heart is a filthy, defiled heart still. It is well that he alone knows what is within me—and how to bear with me. My comfort is comprised in this one sentence, "I know whom I have believed,"—I know that Jesus is mighty to save; I have seen myself lost in every view—but the hope of his mercy; I have fled to him for safety; I have been preserved by him thus far; and I believe he will keep that which I have committed to him even to the end. Blessing and honor, and glory and praise, be to his name, who has loved poor sinners, and washed them in his most precious blood! Amen.

For the rest, alas! alas! I am unfaithful and unprofitable to a degree you would hardly believe; yet, vile as I am, I taste of his goodness every day, and live in hope, that in his own time he will enable me to show forth his praise. I have been much exercised with respect to the ministry; my heart is led that way—but the Lord's hand keeps me in; I need much humbling; there is that in me which seeks great things, though I am, as I said, sadly unfaithful in small ones; therefore, for my pride, I am set aside for the present. I hope you will help me with your prayers; entreat the Lord to empty me of all creature-dependence, that I may live to him alone.

I am your unworthy servant.

Letter 5

To Miss M****.

May 25, 1762

My dear madam,

How can I begin better than with the apostle's words; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all consolation, who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." What a fountain of life, and joy, and praise is here! that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ should condescend to be our Father, our God; that he who is the source of all mercy and consolation, should direct the streams of his fullness to flow into our souls; that, when we were dead in sins, he should look upon us and bid us to live; that, when we were sunk into the depth of despair—he should send his Word and raise us to a lively hope; that he should give us such a bright prospect, and such a sweet foretaste of the exceeding riches of his glory. Oh! who can say which is the most

wonderful part of this wonderful subject—that he should provide such a happiness for such hell-deserving wretches, and that he should commend His great and undeserved love to us in such a wonderful way, as to give his own and His only Son to be born, to be buffeted, to be crucified for us!

Alas! alas! for our stupidity, that we can write, or hear, or speak of these things, with so little feeling, affection, and fruitfulness. Oh! that the power of God would set my heart and pen at liberty while *writing*, and fill your hearts while *reading*—that we may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Oh, this unbelief! Why can we not pierce through the veil of flesh and blood, and by faith behold the humble worship of heaven? What countless multitudes have gone before us in the path that leads to that kingdom! They were, in their time, followers of an unseen Savior, as we are now; but now they see him as he is, face to face, in all His glory, and in all his love; with them are joined the innumerable hosts of angels. Angels and saints, however distinguished, are joined in one happiness, and one employment. Even now, while I write, and while you read, they are praising the Lamb that was slain, and casting their crowns at his feet.

Perhaps this scene is not so far distant as we imagine. Where is heaven? Is it some millions of leagues from us—far beyond the sun and the fixed stars? What have immortal spirits to do with space and place? Who knows but a heaven-born soul, who is freed from the clog of this vile body, and filled with all the fullness of God, may pass as easily and quickly from one verge of the creation—to the other; just as easily as our *thoughts* can change and fly from east to west, from the past to the future? Perhaps, even now, we live in the midst of this glorious assembly.

Heaven is where our God and Savior displays himself; and do not you feel him near you, nearer than any of his visible works? Perhaps there is nothing but this *thin partition of flesh and blood* between us and those blessed spirits that are before the throne; if our eyes were open, we perhaps would see the mountains around us covered with chariots and horses of fire; if our ears were unstopped, we would hear the praises of our great Immanuel resounding in the air, as once the shepherds heard. What a comfortable meditation is this—to strengthen our weak faith in such a dark declining day as this, when sense would almost persuade us that we are left to serve God alone.

When we are wearied with looking on careless sinners, and backsliding professors, let us remember that we have invisible friends present in our assemblies, our conferences, and our closets; who watch over us, and, in ways which we cannot possibly conceive, are helpers of our joy, and witnesses of our conflicts. They are with us now—and we shall soon be with them. Ah! how little does the vain world think of the privileges and the company in which a believer lives! And, what is worse, how faintly do we think of these things ourselves! and this is the *reason* we are so full fears and complaints, so prone to distrust the Lord's methods of dealing with us, and so easily drawn aside to seek for something to rest upon in creatures like ourselves.

With respect to my own experience, I have little now to add to what I have formerly offered; at least, little variety—for, in one sense, every new day is filled up with new things: new mercies on the Lord's part—and new ingratitude on mine; new proofs of the power of sovereign pardoning grace—and new instances of the vileness of my nature; new hills of difficulty, new valleys of humiliation—and now and then (though, alas! very short and seldom) new glimpses of *what* I would be, and *where* I would be. The everlasting love of God; the

unspeakable merits of Christ's righteousness; and the absolute freeness of the Gospel promises—these form the threefold cord by which my soul maintains a hold of that which is within the veil.

Sin, Satan, and unbelief, often attempt to make me let go and cast away my confidence—but as yet they have not prevailed; no thanks to me, who am weaker than water—but I am wonderfully kept by the mighty power of God, who is pleased to take my part, and therefore I trust in him that they never shall prevail against me. A vile sinner, indeed, I am; but, since God, who alone has a right to judge, is pleased to justify the believer in Jesus, who is there that shall dare to condemn? I bless the Lord for that comfortable portion of the Scripture, Zech. 3:1-5. When the Lord is pleased to pluck a brand out of the fire to save it from perishing, what power in heaven or earth shall presume or prevail to put it in again? No! He has done it, and who can reverse it? He has said it—and His Word shall stand. And I humbly believe, (Lord, help my unbelief,) that not one good thing shall fail of all that the Lord my God has, in his Word, spoken to me of.

Yet, alas! I must still charge myself with a great want of watchfulness and diligence; the enemy cannot destroy my foundation—but he spreads many nets for my feet, to weaken me, and to interrupt my peace; and, to my shame I must confess, he too often prevails. The Lord in great mercy preserves me from such sins as would openly dishonor my profession; and a mercy I desire to esteem it, for I can infer from my heart what my life would be, if I were left to myself. I hate sin; I long to be delivered from it—but it is still in me, and works in me. "Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" I bless God for Jesus Christ my Lord. To his grace I commend each of you.

Letter 6

To Miss M****.

September 18, 1762

Dear madam,

I rejoice to find that the Lord prospers his work in your hearts, and that you can say from experience, He is a faithful and good Shepherd. Oh! happy they who are in such a case, who know for themselves how good it is to draw near unto him, to sit down and rest under his refreshing shadow, and feast upon his pleasant fruits

Through grace I also continue waiting on him after my feeble measure; and I trust in his love, that through I sometimes faint, I shall not utterly fall; though I too often step aside, he will not suffer me to wander quite away

There is, indeed, an evil heart of unbelief that would lead me I know not where; but, oh, what a precious mercy to be walled in on every side by everlasting love and free grace! Do not your hearts rejoice in that word, "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms?" And if He is pleased and engaged to uphold us, what power or policy can force us from him? No; we may rejoice in it as a certain truth, let Satan and unbelief say what they will to the contrary, that the Lord's afflicted people on earth are as safe, though not so quiet, as his glorified people in heaven. They are embarked on a troubled sea, the tempests often roar around them, and the waves seem ready to swallow them up; but they have an anchor within the veil, sure and steadfast, which can neither be broken nor removed. They have a Pilot, a Guardian, whose wisdom and power are infinite, and who, of his own good pleasure, has engaged his truth and honor, that He will bring them safe through all, to the haven of eternal rest. Let us therefore trust, and not be afraid; let us rejoice, and say, "The

Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, and he also is become my salvation."

How happy should we be, could we always believe the glorious things which are spoken to us as children, in the Word of him who cannot fail of accomplishing his promise. But are we not fools and slow of heart in this matter? at least, I am, and hence proceed my many complaints. Alas! what a hard heart have I, that can doubt, and repine, and limit the Lord, after all the great things he has shown me! Wretched heart, that can stand it out still, against oaths, and promises, and blood. Methinks I may sum up all my wants and prayers in one sentence—Lord, give me faith! Oh, if faith was in daily exercise, how little would the world, and the things of time and sense, seem in my eyes! What a dreadful thing would sin appear, that spilt my Savior's blood! And how would my very heart rejoice at the sound of Jesus' name? If I had faith to pierce within the veil, and see what is going forward in yon blessed world, how earnestly should I long to be dissolved, that I might join in worship there; and how willingly should I spend and be spent for the Gospel's sake. However, though it is not with us as we would wish, we have reason to bless God it is so well with us as it is; that we are not altogether dead in trespasses and sins, strangers and enemies to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. We have reason to be thankful that we know something of our disease and our Physician. He who has taken our case in hand will, in his own time, perfect the cure. An hour is coming on when we shall no more say, I am sick; we shall see him as he is; we shall be like him; we shall weep no more, all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and the days of our mourning shall be ended

Having, therefore, such promises, let us be animated to run the way of the Lord's commandments with an enlarged heart. Let the joy of the Lord be our strength. Opposition, temptation, affliction, we must

expect; these things lie in the path-way to glory; but we may remember him who has trod the path before us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. I say, tempted and opposed we may be; but it is not probable that we shall be spit upon, buffeted, and crucified for him, as he was for us.

We shall have but a taste, at the most, of that bitter cup which he drank off to the dregs. And he is near us to support us in our distresses, to carry us through, to make us more than conquerors, and then to put the crown of righteousness and victory on our heads with his own hands. Let us then go forth without the camp, bearing his reproach; let us not hang down our heads like bulrushes—but rather count it all joy if we are called to the honor of suffering disgrace, or any kind of inconvenience, for his name's sake. Above all, let us pray to have our conversation as befits the Gospel of Christ; that those who speak evil may be ashamed and put to silence, when they behold our meekness, humility, and Christian carriage

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Remember to pray for your unworthy friend.

Letter 7

To Miss M****.

March 22, 1763

My dear madam,

I gladly embrace the first opportunity that has offered of writing post-free since I was favored with your last letter. It gives me great pleasure to hear from you; and, if our correspondence is made mutually profitable and pleasant, I trust we shall join in giving all the praise to him who has taught us to lisp something of the gracious truths of his Gospel. He is pleased to hide these things from the wise

and prudent, and to reveal them unto babes. We have, indeed, something whereof to glory—but not in ourselves; the right hand of the Lord has been exalted in our behalf; the right hand of the Lord has brought mighty things to pass. When we were utterly helpless and hopeless—he saw and pitied us, and bid us "live!" He did not cut us off in the midst of our sins, (as is the case of thousands,) but waited to be gracious; and, when His hour was come, his time of love, he revealed himself as our mighty Savior, he poured oil and wine into our wounds, he gave us beauty for ashes, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness; he opened our blind eyes, he unstopped our deaf ears, dispossessed the legion of demons, and brought us to sit at his feet clothed, and in our right minds. What a wonder of mercy is this, considered in itself!

But much more if we think of the *means* by which it was effected; that, in order to bring about this blessed change, that mercy and truth might meet together in our salvation, and the righteousness of God harmonize with the sinner's peace—the Lord Jesus, who was rich, humbled himself to become poor; to live an obscure and suffering life, in the form of a servant, and to die a shameful, painful, and accursed death—that we, through his poverty, might be made children and heirs of God; that we might receive grace to serve him here, and dwell with him in glory forever. For this end he willingly endured the cross, and despised the shame; he hid not his face from shame and spitting, he gave his back to the smiters, his cheeks to those who plucked off the hair, he submitted to wear a crown of thorns, to be nailed by the hands and feet to the accursed tree, to endure the fiercest assaults of Satan—yes, to drink the full cup of the wrath of God when "it pleased the Father to bruise him, and to make his soul an offering for sin!"

The apostle well knew the force of his argument to a believing soul, when he said, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." Surely nothing can be more reasonable, than that we should live to him—who thus died for us. Shall we, we who are redeemed from hell at such a price—shall we continue in sin? God forbid! Shall we not rather say, "The love of Christ constrains us" to devote ourselves, our all, to him alone; to abstain from all appearance of evil; to hate every false way, and to know, study, desire, and love nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, that we may feel the power of His resurrection, have fellowship in his sufferings, and be made conformable to his death.

What you observe of the way in which the Lord makes his precious promises food to his children's faith, namely—by inclining their hearts to watchfulness and diligence in all his appointed means, and enabling them to walk unspotted from the vanities and pollutions of the world, waiting for the consolations and teaching of his Holy Spirit—is, I hope, the very sense of my soul. The promises were not given to *slacken* our endeavors—but to *animate* us to earnestness. An evangelical dependence on the Lord for righteousness and strength, and an evangelical obedience to his commands, are well suited to each other; they are, indeed, inseparable, and in equal proportion; where one declines, the other cannot flourish. Too many, as you say, are for separating what God has joined together. But let their mistakes humble and warn us, and show us the necessity of keeping close to the Lord. We must not *presume*; for our hearts are as deceitful as others. Yet we need not be *terrified*; for the Lord whom we serve is able to keep us from falling, and to preserve us from every evil.

We live in dangerous times—the work of the Lord is greatly on the revival in many places, and therefore errors and offences abound;

for, where the good seed is plentifully sown, the enemy will always find means to sow his tares. But our Lord will keep his own children that wait upon him for strength and direction every day. He will give us to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of his truth; and, by the words of his lips, we shall be kept from the paths of the destroyer.

Let us further comfort ourselves with the prospect of a future time, when every evil and infirmity shall cease. You know who has said, "Surely, I come quickly." And do not our hearts echo to his words? Do not the Spirit and the Bride agree? Yes, "Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus!" Come, and put an end to our fears and failings! Come, and deliver us from this scene of strife and confusion! We are weary of living in the tents of Mesech. We are weary of ourselves. Oh! we can hardly bear to pass day after day with such faint unworthy apprehensions of your beauty and your goodness. We are weary and ashamed of our *holy* things. So much coldness and wandering in prayer, in reading the Word, in your public ordinances, that we cannot but say, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove—that I might fly far away from this vain ensnaring world!' When will this *conflict* cease? When shall all our *tears* be wiped away? When shall we see you as you are, and be formed into your complete resemblance? Well, the time is short, and passing fast away. Hold out, faith and patience, a little longer, and he who shall come—will come, and will not tarry. In the mean time, may we have grace to improve the present, as the only opportunity we can have of glorifying our Lord and Savior in a sinful world. When we get safely home, we shall not think we have done and suffered too much along the way.

Letter 8

To Miss M****.

June 11, 1763

Dear madam,

Since my return from Yorkshire, I have had but little leisure to recollect all I have seen, and heard, and been partaker in, for nearly these two months past. These occasional opportunities are now at an end for a season; and my principal fellowship must be with him who is always near. Oh! for grace to improve this high privilege aright; then I shall have no need to regret the defects or loss of creature-converse.

The Lord has led me to many pleasant *streams*; but I desire especially to rejoice in liberty to draw near to the *fountain*. Methinks my heart joins with the desire of those who said, "We would see Jesus!" When we come to heaven, without doubt we shall find great pleasure in communion with the "general assembly of the church of the first-born;" but the very heaven of all—will be to behold him who, for our sakes, was crowned with thorns, and nailed to the cross! All the rest would be but poor company—if *he* were absent. And thus proportionably I find it to be on earth. I delight in his people; but they can only profit me so far as I am enabled to see him in them, and to feel his presence in my own soul. My whole study and desire is comprised in this short sentence, "To walk with God,"—to set the Lord always before me; to hear his voice in every creature, in every dispensation, ordinance, and providence; to keep him in view as my Portion, Sun and Shield; my Strength, Advocate and Savior.

All my complaints may be summed up in this one—a *proneness to wander from him*. This is too frequently the case with me, I hardly know how or why. Through mercy, I am in a measure delivered from the love of this present evil world; the desire of my heart is towards God; I account his loving-kindness to be better than life, and esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be right, and just, and good. I

do not even wish for a dispensation to admit any rival into my heart; he richly deserves it all, and I am willing and desirous to be his alone—and to be wholly conformed to him. Yet still I find the effects of a depraved nature; and, not withstanding all my struggles against inward and outward evil, I am too often carried away from the point of simple faith and dependence.

The lively experience of a Christian is not hard to be *described*; neither is it hard to say much about it. But, to *feel* what we say, to sit down under the shadow of the tree of life, to abide in Christ, to feed on him in my heart by faith with thanksgiving, this I find a rare attainment, easily lost, and not so soon regained. I know enough of it to make me desirous of more, and yet so little, that I have frequent cause to cry out, *My leanness, my leanness!* and to lie low in the dust before God. A remaining root of pride and self-righteousness often springs up and interrupts my peace. Indeed, as to the *ground* of my hopes and acceptance, I am mercifully kept from doubts and fears; I trust in him who has wrought out a perfect righteousness for my justification, and has stretched out an everlasting arm for my salvation. I see the honor of the divine attributes effectually secured, and that God is not only *merciful* and *good*—but *faithful* and *just*, in saving an unworthy believing sinner. But what I want, is not only to *expect* a heaven hereafter—but to *experience* a heaven begun below, to live up to the privileges of the Gospel, to have enlarged desires after holiness, and those desires abundantly answered. I want more of the influences of the Holy Spirit under His various characters, as the Teacher, Quickener, Comforter, and Sealer of the people of God. I want to know more clearly what the apostle desired for his friends, in those two comprehensive prayers, Ephesians 1:17-20, and Ephesians 3:16-19. How little do I understand of that height and depth, and breadth and length, he there speaks of! How faint are my ideas of the glorious hope of his calling, and the exceeding greatness of his

mighty power! Well, blessed be God for the little I have; I trust it is a pledge of more; he has given me to *hunger* and *thirst* after righteousness, and he has said I shall be filled.

I remember the time when I was easy enough about these things; the language of my heart was, "Depart from me!" Yes, I resisted his Spirit, despised his mercy, and counted the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing. But, oh, he "was found by me—who sought him not!" He passed by me, and bid me "live!" He saved me in spite of myself; he would not give me up; he appeared in the hour of my distress, snatched the prey from the hand of the mighty, and delivered the lawful captive. And ever since, how good has he been to me! How gently has he led me! How often has he restored me when wandering, revived me when fainting, healed my breaches, supplied my needs, heard my prayers, and set up a reasonable standard against my enemies, when they have been coming in upon me like a flood! And even now he is with me, he is never weary of doing me good, and I believe he will be with me, even to the end, until at length he brings me home to his kingdom to be near him forever.

Hence, indeed, arises a great part of my grief—to think that I should be so cold, and barren, and unprofitable, under such amazing displays of undeserved love! O Lord, touch the rocky heart—and cause the waters to flow; soften and inflame my heart, that I may at length become your disciple indeed!

I trust you will continue to prize the means of grace, and to watch against every appearance of evil. Take heed lest either of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Beware of that worst of evils—spiritual pride. Pray earnestly for a deep sense of your own insufficiency. I did not thoroughly approve the question that was proposed concerning a power in ourselves, though I believe you

understand it in a good sense; but let us beware of trusting in any other power than the power of Christ received continually by faith. I know carnal minds will abuse this principle, and so they will every other doctrine of the Gospel; but let it suffice us that he who knows us best has said, "Without me you can do nothing."

I am your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 9

To Miss M****.

January 3, 1764

Dear madam,

It is a time of *trial* among your friends here; nor have I wholly escaped. My dear wife has been confined in her chamber more than ten weeks; and we see no present prospect of her recovery. Her illness is a fever, attended with a illness in her head and stomach, which medicines seem insufficient to remove. Through mercy, her illness has not often risen to a very high degree; but, continuing so long, it has rendered her very weak and feeble.

I sympathize for my friends, and I feel for myself. But, blessed be God, I do not mourn as those who have no hope. I know it is not an *enemy* has done this. It is the *Lord* who has saved me out of all afflictions, he who gave me all my good things, he to whom I have surrendered myself and my all; he it is that has laid this trial on me for my good. I believe it to be necessary, because he is pleased to appoint it; and, though at present it is not joyous—but grievous, I trust that in the end he will cause it to yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. I desire to submit to his will in all things; and though I feel the depravity of my nature too often—yet, upon the whole, he enables me to trust to him, and leave all in his hands. I pray that her

health may be restored when he sees best—but especially that her sickness may be sanctified to both our souls. In this we hope and desire the concurrence of your prayers.

At such times as these, the unspeakable blessing of having a hope in God according to the Gospel, appears with double evidence. Faith in Jesus prepares us for every event. Though he puts forth his hand, and seems to threaten our dearest comforts—yet when we remember that it is *his* hand, when we consider that it is his design, his love, his wisdom and his power—we cannot refuse to trust him. The reluctance we feel is against our judgment; for we are sure that what *he* chooses for us must be best. Then again, to think how much less our sufferings are than our sins have deserved; how many mercies we still enjoy on every hand; how much heavier burdens are the portion of many around us; to compare the present momentary affliction with the exceeding weight of glory which shall be revealed; to recollect that the time is short, and the hour is swiftly approaching when the Lord shall wipe away all tears, and constrain us with wonder and joy to sing, "He has done all things well." Such considerations as these, together with the remembrance of what he suffered for us, are always at hand to compose our souls under troubles, and will be effectual according to the degree of faith.

Our faith also is strengthened by affliction; we learn more of our own insufficiency, and the vanity of all things about us; and we discover more of the power, faithfulness, and nearness of a prayer-hearing God. Upon this ground, Habakkuk could sit down and rejoice under the loss of all. He could look at the blasted fig-tree and the withered vine, see the herds and flocks cut off, and every creature-comfort fail; yet, says he, "I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation." Oh, the name of Jesus, when we can speak of him as ours—this is the balm for every wound, cordial for every care; it is as

ointment poured forth, diffusing a fragrance through the whole soul, and driving away the hurtful fumes and fogs of distrust and discontent!

I am, affectionately yours.

Letter 10

To Miss M****

Dear madam,

I am afraid before this, you have charged me with neglect and unkindness. I confess I have delayed too long—but can truly say, my affection for you and all my dear friends at Y— remains unaltered and unabated. Let my various removals, and the necessary new engagements they have brought upon me, plead my excuse, especially as I have not been often faulty in this way; and I hope I shall not in future give you so just reason of complaint.

The Lord has at length brought me into the ministry according to my *desire*, and beyond my *hopes* placed me in a fruitful part of his vineyard, where his Gospel is known, loved, professed, and possessed by many. I have a large congregation, and a comfortable prospect of usefulness. This, I doubt not, will rejoice you, and stir you up to praise him on my behalf, and to **pray for me**—that I may devote my all to his service, and, in a deep sense of my own insufficiency, depend continually upon him for wisdom, strength, and grace to help in time of need. I can justly ask this of you, as I am sure you have a constant place in my heart, and a frequent remembrance in my prayers.

I long to know how you go on—I hope, comfortably. I hope you still find that the joy of the Lord is your strength, that his service is

perfect freedom; that it is good to wait upon him, and that you daily enjoy His presence both in public and in private. Are you not often filled with admiration and love—at the thought of his *distinguishing grace* in calling you out of darkness into light? And when you are enabled by faith to view Jesus as dying for sin, and now pleading for sinners before the throne, are not your hearts melted into godly sorrow, and inflamed with a holy zeal to hate every false way, and to cleave to him with full purpose of heart? These are sure signs that you are walking in the good old way, that you are savingly interested in the blessings of the everlasting covenant, and you may be confidently assured, that he who has begun the good work in you—will perform the same unto the day of Christ Jesus.

We must expect to meet with many trials and troubles in our progress up the narrow path that leads to eternal life; but this one consideration outweighs them all—the Lord is on our side; and, if he is for us, none can be against us to harm us. In all these things we shall be more than conquerors, through him who has loved us. Afflictions, though not in themselves joyous—but grievous—yet when sanctified, are among our choice mercies! In due time they shall yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness; and even at present, they shall surely be attended with seasonable and sufficient supports.

One great desire of the believer, is to understand the great Word of God more and more; and one principal means by which we advance in this knowledge is, the improvement we are enabled to make of our *daily trials*. The *promises* are generally made to an *afflicted* state; and we could not taste their sweetness, nor experience their truth—if we were not sometimes brought into the circumstances to which they relate. It is said, "I will be with them in *trouble*;" but how could we know what a mercy is contained in these words, unless trouble was sometimes our lot? It is said to be the believer's privilege to glory in

tribulation. But we never could know that this is possible, unless we had tribulation to glory in. However, this is matter of joy and glory indeed—to find peace and comfort *within*—when things are disagreeable and troublesome without. Then we are enabled to set to our seal that God is true; then we learn how happy it is to have a refuge which cannot be taken from us; a support which is able to bear all the weight we can lay upon it; a spring of joy which cannot be stopped up by any outward events.

A great part of the little we know of our God, his faithfulness, his compassion, his readiness to hear and to answer our prayers; his wisdom in delivering and providing when all our contrivances fail; and his goodness in overruling everything to our soul's good; I say, much of what we know of these things—we learned in our trials, and have therefore reason to say, It was good for us to be afflicted!

And, as the Lord has brought us safely through thus far, we have good ground to trust him to the end. We know not what is before us. Perhaps we may meet greater difficulties along the way, than we have ever yet seen; but, if we keep in mind *who* delivered us from the *lion* and the *bear*, we may face the *Philistine* also without terror. God will be with us, and strengthen us with strength in our souls. Only it is our wisdom to keep close to him, that, when the evil day comes—we may have confidence before him in all our troubles. When afflictions overtake us in a careless frame, and find guilt upon the conscience, then they are doubly troublesome!

Letter 11

To Miss M****

July 20, 1768

My dear sister,

We agreed to exchange a letter once every three months—but we both began in the same week. I have been waiting ever since for yours; and perhaps our letters may cross upon the road again. If so, we shall be still puzzled; but, if you have not yet written, let me have an answer to this within one month, and then you may expect one from me about a quarter of a year afterwards. Indeed, some things I have lately engaged in, will oblige me to drop a great part of my correspondence; but I cannot prevail with myself to give up yours, because, both present and absent, the Lord has helped and comforted me by you; and so long as I can remember some precious seasons I have enjoyed at Y—, so long will you have a special place in my heart. However, you must not expect *two for one*.

I wish you all could (the more the better,) come and see us at Olney. So I told you when I saw you; so I tell you again. I think you would like to spend a little time with us. Through mercy, we continue to go on very comfortably; our society has been enlarged by several additions; and all in general are in a thriving way. Soon after I returned from Yorkshire, I began to expound the *Pilgrim's Progress* in our meetings on Tuesday evenings; and, though we have been almost seven months traveling with the pilgrim, we have not yet left the house Beautiful; but I believe shall set off for the Valley of Humiliation in about three weeks. I find this book so full of matter, that I can seldom go through more than a page, or half a page at a time. I hope the attempt has been greatly blessed among us; and for myself, it has perhaps given me a deeper insight into John Bunyan's knowledge, judgment, and experience in the Christian life, than I would ever have had without it.

The Lord is pleased to supply me still in public service, and to continue my acceptance with his people. But with regard to what passes between him and my own soul, there is, for the most part, a

very awful distance. I mourn under such a deadness and barrenness in secret duties, as I believe very few, who are in any measure alive, are exercised with. It puts me often to a stand, and affords the enemy a handle to present the most distressing doubts and fears as to my own state. I dare not plead in answer to his suggestions, that I must be right, because the Lord is pleased to assist and own me in the work of the ministry; because the apostle plainly supposes, a man may speak like an angel to others and be but sounding-brass himself; he may speak to good effect to them, and be himself a cast-away. But, though I dare not rest upon this plea, the Lord affords me a better; and has been pleased to give me such a view of the all-sufficient righteousness of Jesus, and the certainty of the promises in Him, that these doubts seldom pierce more than skin-deep; and, at the bottom of my dry, complaining frames—he is pleased to maintain a stable peace. I trust I am *safe*; but I am sure I am not *comfortable*.

I have everything to make me so that this world can afford; but I hope the whole of this world would not satisfy me without the light of his countenance, and a more cheerful ability to love, serve and praise him. For this I sigh, for this I pine. After all, *he knows what is best for me, to humble the pride of my heart, and to maintain in me a spirit of dependence and self-abasement*. Perhaps he sees I am not fit to be trusted with spiritual comforts, especially when my outward path is in all respects so very smooth. I hope his grace is in a measure with me, otherwise I would grow quite careless, or the evils I feel in my heart would break out to the observation of others; neither of which, I hope, is at present the case. To him, and not to me, be the praise; for, if He did not hold me up continually, I am sure I would soon woefully fall.

I rejoiced to hear it was well with you—yes, it is well; you have a good Shepherd who is able to keep you from falling, and to supply all your

needs, to shield you from all dangers, to feed you with heavenly manna and living water; and, before long, you shall see his face without a veil, and shine like the sun in his kingdom forever. May I not address you with the angel's salutation, *Hail, you who are highly favored; the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women*. I need not tell you, that it befits you to be deeply humbled, you know it, and desire it. It befits you likewise to be highly thankful. Complain not of crosses along the way; who was ever spiritually-minded without them? These are among the evidences that you are children; and the Lord will make a rich amends for all. Then we shall weep—we shall sin no more!

Your truly affectionate brother and servant.

Letter 12

To Miss M****.

March 1, 1769

Dear madam,

I now write a little before the time appointed, lest some hindrance should again make you think me forgetful.

I was glad to find you were all living, as I had some apprehensions concerning Miss M****, and especially glad to find that you are all alive in the very best sense, even to God. We have need enough to mourn over our unfruitfulness; but let us remember that it is a special mercy of God—to be enabled to hold fast our profession. For we live in perilous times, when there are such dreadful falls of professors as might well shake and terrify us, if we were not, indeed, founded upon a rock. But the Lord knows those who are his, and he will keep them; yes, he teaches them to improve the miscarriages of others, as motives to stir them up to greater watchfulness, and to

show them the necessity of crying daily to him, "Hold me up—and I shall be safe!"

I suppose you have heard the unhappy case of a man whom I loved as a friend, and honored as an eminent believer—how often have his letters made me ashamed! His dreadful fall has affected me more than anything of the kind I ever met with, since the Lord gave me acquaintance with his people. **Oh, how great is the deceitfulness of the heart, of sin, and Satan!** How should the apostle's words be laid to heart, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall? 1 Corinthians 10:12. However, as I said, those who feel their weakness, whose dependence upon Jesus is scriptural; such a dependence as makes them diligent in the use of appointed means, and desirous of being kept from the appearance of evil; these shall be preserved.

That is a gracious and supporting promise, (to those who feel they can do nothing for themselves, are jealous over their own hearts, and see the snares that are continually spread for their feet,) which the Lord makes to all his faithful people, "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth." Revelation 3:10. Alas! unless he keeps the city—the watchman wakes but in vain. But faith in His name and promise, gives us confidence and encouragement to aim at that watchfulness on our parts, to which his Word exhorts us. The Lord does not keep his people by teaching them so to rest in the promises of his care, as to sit down secure and careless in themselves. But he preserves them from falling away from him, and into sin—by putting his fear in their hearts, by making them sensible of their dangers, and drawing them to come boldly to his throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need. And when his Spirit

bears witness with our spirits, that we are thus looking to him in the way of duty, weak and unworthy as we are, we may triumph in his salvation, and be firmly persuaded, that neither the world nor Satan shall be able to separate us from his love.

Great is the consolation provided for humble souls in what the Scripture declares concerning the power, grace, offices, faithfulness, and compassions of the Redeemer. These things are always equally true in themselves—but not always equally evident to us; for we cannot comfortably apply them—but in proportion as his Spirit is with us. It is therefore wisely and mercifully appointed, that if we grow slack and careless, our comforts and peace should decline, that we may perceive in time that we are getting out of the right path, and cry to the Lord to restore us again.

While those who are always alike, who can talk of assurance and perseverance while they are evidently indulging a trifling and careless spirit, and expect the promises will be accomplished in another way than that path of diligence, humiliation, and prayer which the Lord himself has marked out; these people, I say, always give cause to fear, that they know very little of what they are talking about.

My paper is almost full, and all that I have written is quite beside my first intention. But it may not be the worse for that; I love to give up my heart and pen, without study, when I am writing. The Lord knows the state of my friends, their present temptations, etc. and I look to him to give me a word in season.

Things with us are as usual. The great Shepherd is still pleased to guard our fold, so that the enemy has not yet been allowed to distract us with errors and divisions, nor has one turned back after having fully joined us. Our number increases every year, though not very

fast. As to myself, I am much exercised with a deadness of spirit in secret, which makes me often groan. But, through grace, I can say, that, as I never saw more of my own vileness—so, I think, I never saw Jesus more precious and desirable, or was more clearly sensible of the vanity of everything without him, than I have of late. "None but Jesus!" is my motto. All wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and happiness, which does not spring from and center in him, I renounce.

May the Lord bless each of you with an abiding sense of his precious love, that your hearts may burn, and your lives shine!

Letter 13

To Miss M***B.

Dear madam,

I duly received your letter of the 15th of December, and am very willing still to include Mrs. H**** in our correspondence. I hope she finds in every change of life, that Jesus is still the same, gracious and precious to her soul; and my prayer is, that neither the comforts nor cares of a married state—may dampen the frame of her spirit towards him. *The heart is deceitful, the world ensnaring, the enemy subtle and powerful; but we know who has said, "My grace is sufficient for you."* He is able to keep us, not only safe as to the end—but also lively, faithful, and dependent along the way, in every circumstance and station to which his providence calls us.

I observe your last is written in a more complaining style than usual. Causes of complaint are, indeed, innumerable; but remember, "the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Do not be surprised that you still find the effects of indwelling sin—it must and will be so. The frame of our fallen nature is depraved throughout, and, like the *leprous house*, it must be entirely demolished, and raised anew. While we are in this world, we shall groan, being burdened. I wish you to long and breathe after greater measures of sanctification; but we are sometimes betrayed into a legal spirit, which will make us labor in the very fire to little purpose. If we find deadness and dryness stealing in upon us, our only relief is to look to Jesus—to His blood for pardon—to His grace for strength; we can do nothing of ourselves. To pore over our own evil hearts will not cure them; but He who was typified by the brazen serpent is ever present, lifted up to our view in the camp; and one believing sight of Him will do more to restore peace to the conscience, and life to our graces, than all our own lamentations and resolutions!

Farther, we must expect changes. Were we always the same—we would dream that we had some power or goodness inherent in ourselves; he will therefore sometimes withdraw, that we may learn our absolute dependence on him. When this is the case, it is our part humbly to continue seeking him in his own appointed means, and patiently to wait his promised return.

It is a point of great wisdom to know our gospel liberty, and yet not abuse it; to see that our hope stands sure and invariable, distant from all the changes we feel in our experience, that we are accepted, not because we are comfortable or lively—but because Jesus has loved us, and given himself for us; and yet, at the same time, to be longing and thirsting for the light of his countenance, and a renewed sense of his love upon our hearts.

Two things we should always guard and pray against; that the knowledge of our acceptance may not make us secure and careless;

and likewise, that our endeavors after conformity to his revealed will, may not subject us to a spirit of bondage. The apostle, who well knew the nature of our warfare, exhorts us to "rejoice in the Lord *always*." He knew what conflicts we would meet with from afflictions, imperfections, temptations, and desertions; yet he says, *always*; which can only be practiced by those who see and keep in mind that they are complete in Christ; that he is all in all to them; their Righteousness, Wisdom and Strength; their Sun and Shield; their Friend and Representative before the throne; their Shepherd and their Husband. If I may speak my own experience, I find that to keep my eye simply upon Christ, as my peace, and my life, is by far the hardest part of my calling. Through mercy, he enables me to avoid what is wrong in the sight of men—but it seems easier to deny self in a thousand instances of *outward conduct*, than in its ceaseless endeavors to act as a principle of righteousness and power.

John Bunyan, in his advanced years, took notice of the abominations that had still too much place in his heart; one of them was, he says, *a secret cleaving to the covenant of works*. I am sure this is no small abomination in a believer; but, alas! it cleaves as close to me as my skin, and costs me many a sigh.

Letter 14

To Mrs. H****.

September 21, 1770

Dear Madam,

As the engagements you lately have entered into have not separated you from each other, I can, as formerly, write to you *both* at once. I would be glad to hear that the third in our correspondence was as comfortably settled in H—likewise. However, I beg you will

mention my love to her when opportunity offers, and tell her, that I hope to be always mindful of her. Your being both removed from Y—must doubtless be a great trial to her; but I trust she will find an all-sufficient God always near to make good every change and every loss.

I congratulate Mrs. C**** on her marriage, and Mrs. H**** on the Lord's goodness in preserving her life, and giving her a living child; for the rest I may speak to you without distinction. The grace of God enabled you both to walk honorably in a single life; I trust the same grace will enable you to adorn your profession in the married state. I need not tell you, that both the sphere of your *comforts* and your *trials* is now enlarged. Your opportunities for *usefulness* will be increased; so likewise will the *snares* and *temptations* in the path of duty. I take it for granted that you are very happy, that you are united to your husbands, not only by marriage—but by mutual affection, and, what is better still, by mutual faith; and that, as you sought the Lord's direction before the marriage was formed, so you came together evidently by his blessing. What then shall I say to you? Only, or chiefly this—Beware of being too happy—beware of idolatry. Husbands, children, possessions, everything by which the Lord is pleased to afford us contentment or pleasure—are full of snares. How hard is it to love a creature just as we ought; and so to possess our temporal blessings—as neither to over value nor undervalue them! How rare is it to see a believer go on steadily, and in a lively, thriving spirit, if remarkably favored with prosperous circumstances! It is hard—but it is not impossible—impossible, indeed, it is to us; but it is easy to him who has said, "My grace is sufficient for you."

My desire is, that you may be both witnesses of the Lord's faithfulness to this his good promise. I wish you health, peace, and prosperity; but, above all, that your souls may prosper; that you may still prefer the light of God's countenance to your chief joy; that you

may still delight yourselves in the Lord; be daily hungering and thirsting after him, and daily receiving from his fullness, even grace for grace; that you may rejoice in his all-sufficiency, may taste his love in every dispensation; that every blessing of his common providence may come to you as a fruit and token of his covenant-love; that the frame of your spirits may be heaven-ward, your conduct exemplary, and your whole conversation may breathe the meekness, simplicity, and spirituality, which befit the Gospel of Christ. I have strong confidence in the Lord for you, my dear friends, that it shall be even thus. And it will rejoice my heart to hear that it is so.

However the Lord may be pleased to indulge us with comforts and mercies here in this world, still this is not—and cannot be, our rest. Indwelling sin, the temptations of Satan, changing dispensations, and the vanity which is inseparably entwined with every earthly connection, will more or less disturb our peace. But there is a brighter world, where sin and sorrow can never enter; every moment brings us nearer to it! Then every imperfection shall cease, and our best desires shall be satisfied beyond our present conceptions—then we shall see him whom having not seen we love—we shall see him in all his glory, not as now—but face to face, without a veil. We shall so see him, so as to be completely transformed into his perfect image. Then likewise we shall see all his redeemed, and join with an innumerable multitude of all nations, people, and languages, in singing the triumphant song of Moses and the Lamb forever! Then we shall look back with wonder on all the way which the Lord led us through this wilderness, and shall say, "He has done all things well!" May this blessed hope comfort our hearts, strengthen, our hands, and make us account nothing dear or hard—so that we may finish our course with joy. Pray for us; and believe me to be.

Your affectionate friend and servant.

Letter 15

To Mrs. C****.

May 2, 1771

Dear madam,

I spent about five weeks at London lately, which has occasioned me to delay answering your letter something longer than usual. But I have not forgotten you. The *change of your situation*, will probably change the methods of Satan in his unwearied attempts to disturb the peace of those who love the Lord; for he knows how to suit himself to our circumstances, whatever they be. It may likewise draw forth the weakness of indwelling sin, in ways different from your former experience, and give you new views of the evil and deceitfulness of the heart. But, as I trust, you had an eye to the Word, Spirit, and Providence of God—when you entered into the marriage relation, and sought his blessing by repeated prayer—you need not fear but his grace will be sufficient for you.

The more the Lord blesses you in earthly things, the more sensible you will be (if your heart is kept alive) that *true happiness is only to be found in himself; for sin and vanity are closely connected with everything beneath the skies!* In this view I trust he will enable you to number your *troubles* among your mercies, as necessary to keep your soul from cleaving to the dust, and to quicken your prayers and desires heavenwards. Our necessary relationships in this life, especially those which are most pleasing, are attended with many snares. May the Lord keep you sensible of the danger, that you may be continually crying, "Hold me up—and then I shall be safe!" and be watchful against the first appearances of a decline in the power of the

life of faith. I am, however, fully persuaded that a due attention to the concerns of our relative duties and callings in this world, can never be properly hindrances to us, of walking with God. These earthly things may require some of our thoughts, and much of our time; but if we can manage them in obedience to His will, and with a reference to his glory, they are then sanctified, and become pious actions. And I doubt not but a believer, acting in a right spirit, may be said to worship God in the shop or kitchen, no less than when waiting on him in prayer and Scripture meditation.

But he must teach us to do this, for we have no sufficiency of ourselves; yes, he must teach us and strengthen us continually, for we cannot live by past experience, without a new supply of grace from hour to hour—and this he has promised, see Isaiah 27:3. It is not the *action*, (if lawful,) but the *spirit* with which it is performed, which the Lord regards. We are naturally desirous to do some *great* thing; but all the law is fulfilled, evangelically, by love. *A person called by providence to sweep the streets, if he does it to the Lord, performs as acceptable a service as another who should preach the Gospel to thousands!*

As to cares and anxieties which are unnecessary, and therefore sinful, you will not be wholly without them while there is any unbelief and sin remaining in the heart. Your great mercy will be to be humbled for them, and to take occasion from all that you feel amiss, to adore the free grace of God, to rejoice in the perfect work, boundless compassion, and prevailing intercession of Jesus. He knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust. And though many evils arise in our hearts which are new to us, they are not new to him. *He knew what we were, and what we would be, before he called us; and yet it pleased him to make us his people!*

I am sorry to hear that you have uneasiness and differences in your church—for, through mercy, I wish well to all the Lord's assemblies without respect to names and parties. I shall be glad to hear that the *Healer of breaches* is pleased to settle you comfortably again. In the mean time, I trust you will account it a privilege that you live in a place where the preaching of the Gospel is not confined to one denomination.

I bless God, we are still favored with *peace* here. May we prize it—it is that to the soul, or to a church, which health is to the body. There may be life—but there can be no comfort without it. While Satan can prevail to break a church's peace, there is usually a full stop put to edification. There may be preaching, and hearing, and praying; but everything will be weak and languid. For the Holy Spirit, whose emblem is the *peaceful dove*, will not dwell in the midst of strife and contention. It is an awful token that he is withdrawn already, when these evils are greatly prevalent. When ordinances are powerful, and both ministers and people taste that the Lord is gracious, things may arise, through human infirmity and Satan's subtlety, to threaten the continuance of peace; but then it will be as at the breaking out of a fire, where everyone exerts himself to extinguish it before it can get to a head. We have many *combustibles* in our hearts, and the enemy will throw sparks upon them to set all in a flame; but happy are those who so value *peace*, as to be willing to give up anything but *truth* to preserve it. We join in love to you both. Pray for us.

I am affectionately yours,

Letter 16

To Mrs. C****.

February 11, 1772

Dear madam,

I find by the date of your last letter, that I have not been so punctual to answering as formerly. Indeed, business of one kind or another so grows on my hands, that I am in arrears to many.

I hope the Lord, who has mercifully given you children, will enable you to bring them up in his fear, and accompany your endeavors with his blessing; and make them in due time partakers of his grace, that they may know and love the Lord God of their parents.

Your spiritual warfare, it seems, still continues; and it will continue while you remain here in this world. But he is faithful who has promised to make us more than conquerors in the last conflict—then we shall hear the voice of war no more forever. **Whatever we suffer along the way—the end will make amends for all.** The repeated experience we have of the deceitfulness of our own hearts, is a means which the Lord employs to make us willing debtors to his free grace, and teach us to live more entirely upon Jesus. He is our peace, our strength, our righteousness, our all in all. And we learn from day to day, that, though diligence and watchfulness in the use of appointed means is our part—yet we are preserved in life, not by *our* care—but *his*. We have a watchful Shepherd, who neither slumbers nor sleeps; his eyes are always upon his people; his arm underneath them; this is the reason that their enemies cannot prevail against them. We are conscious to ourselves of many unguarded moments, in which we might be surprised and ruined if we were left without his almighty defense. Yes, we often suffer loss by our folly; but he restores us when wandering; revives us when fainting; heals us when wounded; and, having obtained his help—we continue to this hour; and he will be our Guard and Guide even unto death. He has delivered, he does deliver; and in him we trust that he will yet deliver us.

We have had but few changes here, since my last letter; only that of late the Lord has been pleased to give His Word a more convincing power than for some time before. We have had several awakened within these few months, who appear to be truly in earnest. Upon the whole, though we have many causes of humiliation, I hope it is with us in some measure according to that pleasing description, Act. 9:31. Help us to praise the Lord for his goodness to us.

As to myself, there is little variation in my path. The *law of sin* in my members distresses me; but the Gospel yields relief. It is given me to rest in the finished salvation, and to rejoice in Christ Jesus as my all in all. My soul is athirst for nearer and fuller communion with him. Yet he is pleased to keep me short of those sweet consolations in my retired hours which I could desire. However, I cannot doubt, but he is with me, and is pleased to keep up in my heart some sense of the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, my own weakness, and his glorious all-sufficiency. His I am, and him I desire to serve. I am, indeed, a poor servant; but he is a gracious Master. Oh! who is a God like unto Him—who forgives iniquity, and casts the sins of his people into the depths of the sea? I shall not always live at such a poor rate—the land to which we are going is far different than this wilderness through which he is now leading us. Then we shall see his face—and never, never sin!

If either of you or your's should come towards London, we shall be glad to see you; but, if not here, we hope to meet in glory. There is but little probability of my seeing you in Yorkshire. We may meet however at present, as I hope we do—at a throne of grace. I entreat a frequent remembrance in your prayers, both for me and mine. This is the best proof we can give of our love to our friends, to bear them upon our hearts before the Lord. Afford me this, and I will pay you in kind as the Lord shall enable me.

Yours in the best friendship.

Letter 17

To Mrs. C****.

June 5, 1776

My dear friends,

I might apologize for my long silence—but you set me the example; so let us exchange forgiveness. You are busy—and I can assure you I have but little leisure time. However, I can say with you, that my regard remains. I still remember with pleasure past times, in which we have taken sweet counsel together; and I look forward to the happy period of all interruptions, when I trust we shall meet to spend an everlasting Sabbath in praise to Him who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood.

My wife and I are still, by the Lord's mercy, spared to each other. She joins me in love to you both, and to your husbands. We are not only spared—but highly favored with health, peace, and an abundance of temporal mercies. I am still supported, and in some measure owned, in the pleasing service of preaching the glorious Gospel to my fellow sinners; and I am still happy in an affectionate, united people. Many have been removed to the better world—but others have been added to us; so that I believe our numbers have been rather increased than diminished from year to year. But most of our old experienced believers have finished their course, and entered into their rest. Some such we had, who were highly exemplary and useful ornaments to their profession, and very helpful to the young of the flock. We miss them; but the Lord, who has the fullness of the Spirit, is, I hope, bringing others forward to supply their places.

We have to sing of abounding grace, and at the same time to mourn over the abounding of sin; for too many in this neighborhood have resisted convictions so long, that I am afraid the Lord has given them up to hardness of heart; they are either obstinately determined to hear no more, or sit quietly under the preaching, and seem to be *sermon-proof*. Yet I hope and pray for a day of power in favor of some who have hitherto heard in vain. Blessed be God, we are not without some seasons of refreshment, when a sense of *his gracious presence* makes the ordinances sweet and precious. Many miracles he has wrought among us in the twelve years I have been here. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, and the dead are raised to spiritual life. Pray for us, that his arm may be revealed in the midst of us.

As to myself, I have had much experience of the deceitfulness of my heart, much warfare on account of the remaining principle of indwelling sin. Without this experience I would not have known so much of the wisdom, power, grace, and compassion of Jesus. I have good reason to commend him to others, as a faithful Shepherd, an infallible Physician, an unchangeable Friend! I have found him such. Had he not been with me, and were he not mighty to forgive and deliver—long ago I would have been trodden down like mire in the streets. He has wonderfully preserved me in my outward walk, so that they who have watched for my halting have been disappointed. But he alone knows the innumerable backsliding, and the great perverseness of my heart. It is of his grace and mercy that I am what I am! Having obtained help from him, I continue to this day! And he enables me to believe that he will keep me to the end, and that then I shall be with him forever.

I hope your souls prosper, and that all the comforts, employments, cares, and trials of life—are sanctified by his blessing, to lead you to a

more immediate dependence upon himself; that he enables you to glorify him in your families and connections, and conforms you to his image, in love, spirituality, meekness, and resignation. Many things must be attended to in their places; but, oh, the blessing of being taught to do and to bear all things for his sake! The *life of faith* is—to be continually waiting on him, receiving from him, rendering to him, resting in him, and acting for him. In every other view, the present state is but vanity and vexation of spirit. But, when the love of Jesus is the leading and constraining motive of our conduct—the necessary business of every day, in the house, the shop, or the field—is ennobled, and makes a part of our spiritual worship; while every dispensation of Providence, whether pleasant or painful to the flesh, is received and rested in as an intimation of his will, and an evidence of his love and care for us. Happy are they who do not stop short in *names, forms, and notions*—but are desirous of knowing what *effects* such a Gospel as we profess is capable of producing in the spirit and conduct of those to whom it comes, not in word only—but in the demonstration and power of the Holy Spirit.

I commend you and your's to the Lord. I shall always be glad to hear from you; and remain your affectionate friend and servant.

Letter 18

To Mrs. C****.

June 12, 1779

My dear friend,

Your last letter was long in coming; but I have deprived myself of all right of complaining, by the slowness of my answer. You plead lack of time; allow me to plead the same. During the first years of our correspondence you had no family, and I had few engagements

compared to what I have had since. As we grow older, connections and businesses multiply, while, alas! for my part, my ability to attend to the many things which call upon me, seems rather to decline. My regard for you still exists, and I use you no worse than I am constrained to use many others whom I have long and dearly loved, and who have equal reason to say I am become a poor correspondent.

For three years past, my wife has experienced much ill health; and this alone has abridged me of many of those hours which I used to employ in writing to my friends. Of late she has been better upon the whole—but seldom comfortably well for many weeks together. But in the course of these trials we have had much experience of the Lord's goodness and compassion; and I have found him, and still find him, a prayer-hearing God, and a very present help in time of trouble. She joins with me in love to you both, to Mrs. H****, and my other friend at Y****, whose name used to stand with your's, and of whom I have heard nothing for a long time.

The life of leisure you once had, is now changed for the care of a family. It is an honorable and important charge. I hope the Lord continues to bless you in it; and that you have comfort in seeing your children grow up like olive plants about your table. May he give you wisdom and success in your attempts to bring them up for the Lord; that in due time you, and the children he has given you, may appear together at his right hand.

As to myself, though I have now entered the sixteenth year of my ministry here, and have almost finished the fifty-fourth of my life; my health and strength, through his blessing, continue firm; and through his mercy I feel myself no more weary *in* his service, or weary *of* it, than at first. I have comfort in the flock he has committed

to my care; I have seen many of them depart in peace, and I rejoice to think they are safely housed out of the reach of storms. He has from time to time raised up others to supply their places, and in general they walk agreeably to the Gospel, in peace among themselves, and united in affection to me. I speak of the serious people chiefly. Multitudes in the town are mere hearers; and some will not hear at all. But all behave civil, and give me no other trouble than that which I ought to feel most sensibly, a concern for their precious souls, that, when the light of the Gospel shines around them, there should be so many who prefer darkness to light, because their deeds are evil.

Every year, and indeed every day—affords me new proofs of the evil and deceitfulness of my heart, and of my utter insufficiency to think even a good thought by myself! But I trust, in the course of various exercises, I have been taught more of the power, grace, and all-sufficiency of Jesus. I can commend him to others, not from hearsay—but from my own experience. His name is precious; his love is wonderful; his compassions are boundless. I trust I am enabled to choose him as my all, my Lord, my Strength, my Savior, my Portion. I long for more grace to love him better; for, alas! I have reason to number myself among the least of saints and the chief of sinners.

Eleven Letters to a Friend

Letter 1

August 8, 1776

My dear friend,

I am very willing to meet you with a letter at York, though I have no particular advice to offer. It seems probable, as you say, that your

expected interview with the G ____ , will afford you some further light into your future path. I am in no pain about the event. Man is a *proud* creature, and prone to please himself with the imagination of *influence* and *power*; but, in reality, he has none any further than as it is given him from above! The G ____ , or whoever else are displeased with you, have their commission, and limits assigned them, by one whom they little think of; and when they seem to think they can do most, they shall in effect do nothing but as instruments of his will. I trust the Lord will stand by you, put his love into your heart, and suitable words into your mouth, and overrule the minds of those with whom you have to do. And, if he has further service for you in that situation, you will find that his hook and bridle will hold them in, so that they shall not be able to hurt you!

As you know *whom* you have believed, and *where* to apply for strength suited to your day, according to his promise, I am so far from trembling for the event, that I congratulate you on the honorable opportunity that is before you of witnessing a good confession in such a presence, which I trust the Lord will own and bless you in. Fear them not! Remember Jesus stood before the high priest, Herod, and Pilate—for you. But how different are the cases!

You may perhaps meet with some expressions of dislike—but the laws of the land will protect you from the full effects of their resentment; and even the laws of politeness will, in some degree, restrain them. You are not going to be buffeted, stripped, and spit upon! Look at your regimentals, and let them remind you of Him who wore a scarlet robe for you, not as a mark of honorable service—but as a badge of infamy. You are a soldier; if you were appointed to march against a battery, though it is a service not agreeable to flesh and blood—yet a sense of honor, and what you owe to your king, your country, and yourself, would prompt you to reject any rising thought

of fear, that might betray you to act a part unsuitable to your character, with disdain.

But, oh, how much stronger and more animating are the motives which should influence us as *Christian soldiers*! I trust you will fully feel their influence. There is but a veil of flesh and blood between you and that *unseen world* where Jesus reigns in all his glory! Perhaps you will be attended with such companies of the heavenly host as made themselves visible to the shepherds. How will they rejoice to see you fervent and faithful in your Master's cause! Nay, he himself will be there; and, though you cannot see him—he will be looking upon you, as he did on his servant Stephen.

Then think of the day when he, in his turn, will own and confess you before an assembled world. Yes, perhaps, upon the spot he may witness his approbation; and if you can hear *him* whispering in your heart, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" you will little regard what is said against you. As to *consequences*, leave them in his hand, they shall be all good and glorious to those who fear him. He may allow a cloud to appear—but he can blow it away in a moment; he may permit this or that source to be stopped up—but he can open twenty in the place of it. He can show you how little dependence there is to be placed on the friendship and favor of *men*—when once we are enabled to be active and hearty for *him*; but these failures shall only give occasion of showing you likewise, how all-sufficient he is in wisdom, love, and power—to give more and better than creatures can possibly deprive us of. Fear not, be strong—yes, I say unto you, be strong! The Lord Almighty is with you!

Letter 2

April 13, 1767

My dear sir,

I hope you find, while you attempt to water others—that you are watered and blessed in your own soul. May the Lord open your mouth, and strengthen your hands, and own your labors, if it is his pleasure to employ you in his public service. The fields are, indeed, white for harvest; and though I must govern myself by such views as the Lord is pleased to give me, when I look round and see the state of things, and the miserable darkness and carelessness of poor sinners, I am not sorry that there are those who can and do attempt those services which I cannot. When I see the heart humble, and simply devoted to the Lord, in whatever way Christ is preached, I can, yes and will, rejoice. Give me permission to suggest, that the enemy of souls will owe you a bitter grudge for your zeal; you will have many eyes upon you, and hearts against you; the work is great, and the heart deceitful. I doubt not but you are apprized of the need of watchfulness and prayer; yet you will not be angry with me for reminding you.

You will have two counter-streams to withstand, either of which is sufficient to knock us off our feet, unless the Lord upholds us; I mean, *opposition* and *popularity*. *Opposition* is troublesome, and in some respects perilous—as we are too prone to catch something of the same harsh spirit. But *popularity* is much more dangerous. Our *friends* are often eventually our worst *enemies*. It is not easy to find a preacher that has been honored with much popularity, who has not been, at some times, greatly hurt by it. It is apt to make us forget who, and what, and where we are; and if we are left to suppose ourselves *people of importance*—but for a single hour, it will surely prove to our loss, and may expose us to a wound that may leave a lasting scar, even though the Lord is pleased to heal it.

It behooves us, my dear sir, to keep up a clear distinction in our minds between *gifts* and *grace*. I can say, from experience, that it is possible to have a tolerable degree of liberty for outward service, so as to hold a congregation pretty fast by the ears, to make them weep, yes, and perhaps to weep with them—when the *heart* is far enough from a right disposition before the Lord. These things you know; I had them not in view when I began—but they occurred in writing, and I set them down as a humbling part of my experience. May the Lord enable us to walk *humbly*—and then we shall walk *safely*; to such he will give more grace. He will be their light, their strength, and their joy. May you ever find him so.

Letter 3

June 15, 1767

Dear sir,

You perhaps think me long in answering your acceptable and obliging favor—but I was willing to take a second thought concerning the point on which you desire my advice. I shall begin with this, and may the Lord help me to write as I ought.

I am fully satisfied with your views, and your abilities for the ministry, and would have greatly rejoiced to have seen you among our ranks, if the Lord had inclined you that way, and opened you a door in his providence at your first setting out. But I fear the thing is, humanly speaking, impracticable, after the steps you have taken. Considering your situation in life, and the public manner in which you have preached, I apprehend you have made yourself too obnoxious for any bishop to accept your application. But, as the Lord has all hearts in his bands, and can bring to pass things that are most unlikely, I ought to suppose the thing so far possible, as to admit the

consideration of another particular, whether, if you could procure ordination, you could properly, and with integrity, accept of it, and enter as a minister of the *Established Church*, with a previous and fixed determination to use your liberty indifferently, of preaching in all places and circumstances as you do now. And, I must own, that if you are determined to pay no regard to those regulations which seem to me incumbent on ministers in the Establishment, I think you had better remain as you are.

If you are satisfied with your present call, you are now free to act as your conscience shall lead you—why then should you *fetter* yourself? For, more or less, you will find *episcopal ordination* a restraint. As to the positive engagements you would bring yourself under to the bishops, I think all is included in the term *canonical obedience*; to which you must bind yourself by oath. The measure of this obedience undoubtedly must be the canons; and the sense, in my judgment is, obedience to all their requirements, so far as the canons extend, and where conscience does not unavoidably interfere. Indeed, I am not sure that the canons do expressly prohibit a minister from preaching itinerantly, when he pleases; and therefore it may seem you are not bound by them. This, I think, is an excuse for those of my brethren, who, having been ordained before they considered or knew the nature of their function, and awakened afterwards, have been led insensibly, and by steps, to extend their labors far and wide.

But things are so well understood now on both sides, that for a man to apply for ordination with a design to act contrary to the general rule of parochial curate, carries the appearance of insincerity; and if the canons are silent, I believe the laws of the land give every minister such a right in his own parish, as not to allow any other person to preach in it without his consent, unless he claims, as a Dissenter, the benefit of the Act of Toleration. I apprehend all the

church ministers who act notoriously itinerantly, are exposed to suffer inconveniences for it, if ever it shall please God to permit their superiors to put their power, by law, in force against them.

As to those who are already in this way, and who think it their duty to go on in defiance of all that might be done against them, I have nothing to say; I rejoice in their zeal and success, so far as they appear to act for the glory of God and the good of souls, and the Lord is pleased to honor them with usefulness; but I cannot so well approve of a person's entering into episcopal orders, with a view to disregard the established regulations of the church. In your case it seems not at all necessary, for you would not preach better, nor probably to greater numbers, if you were ordained; for your red coat and shoulder-knot will probably excite the curiosity of the people as much as my gown and cassock can do.

And then I have some reluctance to your giving up your chaplaincy in the army, and especially as you assured me that your influence, both with the officers and soldiers, is no way lessened by your preaching. The continual moves of your regiment will give you the opportunity of declaring the glad tidings in a great variety of places; your rank in the army will excite the attention of the people wherever you go; and how useful the Lord may make you among the soldiery, who can tell? So that supposing you are satisfied in yourself as to your present proceedings, you seem to have fairer and more extensive opportunities for usefulness than any of us, and none can charge you with inconsistency, or give you trouble for what you do.

I do not wonder that your family should wish you to take orders, because it would in some measure remove that odium which they suppose you are under by preaching in your present capacity. But I am persuaded this alone would not be a sufficient motive to you. Mr.

H ____ 's judgment has a considerable weight with me; but, in the present case, I am constrained to differ from him, for the reasons I have suggested above. However, I trust that the Lord whom you serve, will be your best and infallible *Counselor*, and in time give you clear satisfaction as to what *he* would have you to do.

I am sorry to see myself so near to the bottom of my paper, before I have an opportunity to say something of that precious name, Jesus. Continue to look to him, my dear friend, and he will *guide* you with his eye, give you *support* for the present, and *direction* for the future. If he were upon earth, and you could get near him—would you not lay your difficulties before him? You have the same liberty and encouragement to do it now—as if you saw him with your eyes! I need not tell you this; you know it; yet though our judgments are fully convinced that he is as near, as kind, as attentive to our concerns, as ready to hear and as willing to assist as our own hearts can wish—it is not always easy to reduce these sentiments to practice. Unbelief, that injurious hindrance, interposes and starts a thousand anxious thoughts to hide him from us. If you find, through grace, that you are submissive, and only desirous to know his will, and continue waiting upon him, then fear not; he will not allow a soul that depends upon him to take a wrong step in a matter of such importance. And if you find that he has assisted and owned you in what you have done hitherto, I would not have you entertain an uneasy doubt that you have acted wrong.

Letter 4

July 14, 1767

Dear sir,

I thank you for your letter of the 3rd. I wish I could offer you advice

worthy of the confidence you place in me. Your reasons for a settlement in the *Church of England* are weighty. I can only say, be much in prayer, and attend to the leading of Divine Providence, and I doubt not but he will make your path of duty clear; not perhaps all at once—but by degrees, and, though slowly—yet surely; so that after you have been exercised with uncertainties for a season, you shall find, that he is overruling all to bring about what he has already appointed for you!

As you seem to think that you may, upon cool reflection, be induced to see it the duty of a minister more peculiarly to attend to the oversight of a single flock, my principal objection to your applying for ordination among us, is so far lessened. And I trust, if you alter your sentiments on this point, it will be owing to reflection and real conviction, and not to a bias arising from the motives and views you mention in your letter. When a person has a growing doubt of his own judgment, he is apt to be influenced (perhaps too far) by the advice and example of those whom he esteems wiser and better than himself. It is no wonder, therefore, that if you attend only to the advice and example of those of our friends who are warm for *itinerancy*, when you consider their zeal, their motives, and their apparent success, you should think it matter of duty, not only to follow—but, if possible, to go beyond them. For my own part, the love and esteem I bear to many people in that line is so great, that I know not if I dared trust myself to be shut up long among them in a room, lest they should, as it were, compel me to break through all bounds, and totally forget the views I have had upon mature deliberation, and in my cooler hours.

But I find it best, when good men are divided, to hear what may be said on both sides. I imagine your connections have chiefly led you to consider the plausible appearances on the one side of the question.

But I can assure you, there are (if I mistake not) some weighty considerations to be offered in behalf of a parish pastor. And, by way of balance to what has occurred to you against it, I could wish you had an opportunity of conversing with my friend Mr. T ____ , who, perhaps might be of use to settle your judgment and determination as to your future conduct. Though the difficulties in the way of your ordination are great, they are certainly not insuperable. They were very great against me—yet the Lord opened a way. Some concessions will perhaps be expected from you, with respect to what will be called the irregularity of your late proceedings; and therefore the strongest bars will be laid in the way by your honor and conscience, unless you should see that, all things considered, it is best for a clergyman generally to restrain his outreach efforts within the bounds allowed and prescribed by church law; for, I dare say, unless you see it so, you will not say so.

You may depend upon the news of your engagement, which you entrusted me with, being kept a profound secret. Though you have not mentioned the person—yet as you seem to speak as if she were not a stranger to me, I suppose I guess who she is; and if I guess right, I congratulate your choice; for it seems suitable in every respect. I have reason to be a friend to marriage; and I doubt not but if the Lord is pleased to give you a suitable partner, it will both add to your comfort, and strengthen your hands in his service. Commit yourself, therefore, to him; act so far as he affords you an opening; consult him step by step; follow his providence closely—but do not *force* it. We are prone to pursue things that appear *desirable*—with too much keenness; but in *his leading* there is usually a *praying* time and a *waiting* time. Yes, he often brings a seeming death upon our hopes and prospects, just when he is going to accomplish them, and thereby we more clearly see and more thankfully acknowledge his interposition.

The bearer of this letter is a simple, honest man; yet mature in the Lord's ways for the time of his standing. Like most of the flock, he has many exercises, both inward and outward. If you have time to speak with him, he will tell more at large how it is with us.

I rejoice that the Lord brought you honorably off from your challenge, and gave you victory without fighting. This shows his power over all hearts, and that he is a sure refuge and buckler to all who trust him. Oh, that we could trust him at all times, and pour out our hearts before him. When Moses was in any difficulty—he repaired to the tabernacle, and always found direction and support. This was his peculiar privilege, as the people could not come so near. But under the Gospel, all the Lord's people have the privilege of Moses, to come into his immediate presence, and tell him all their needs at all times. How happy should we be if we could fully improve this privilege, and bring everything, as fast as it happens, to the throne of grace. Surely he does not sit between the cherubim for any other purpose than to give us answers of grace and peace all the day long.

I am, dear sir, your affectionate servant and fellow-pilgrim.

Letter 5

September 28, 1776

My dear friend,

Your letter of the 31st of August, from York, gave much pleasure to me, and to your friends here. I rejoice that the Lord enabled you to stand up for his truth, and gave you the victory in the manner you relate. It is a proof that he is indeed on your side; and I think it is an intimation that you are in the right place. Indeed, I own I could never heartily wish to see you among our ranks; for I think you bid fair to

be more extensively useful by keeping your chaplaincy in the army, and continuing to preach where the Lord opens you a door. As to considerations of a personal nature, I doubt not but you desire to hold them in subordination to the will of God and the calls of duty; and why might not what you hinted to me, take place while you are a chaplain? Of this you are the best judge; but in general, I know the Lord can and will order all things for the good of his children, and especially of those who are desirous to give themselves up, without reserve, to his service, and to cast all their care and concerns on him by faith and prayer.

I hope Mr. B ____ and you are mutually comfortable and profitable to each other. I understand that his heart is warm for the work, and perhaps your zeal and example have quickened his desires to what I sometimes hear called, an apostolic mission, and what others disapprove by the term *itinerancy*. For my own part, I wish well to all, both *pastors* and *itinerants*, who love and preach Jesus. But I remember a question something to the purpose, (and that he was a man of a warm zeal, and as little under the influence of worldly wisdom as any we hope to be in this day,) who somewhere asks, "Are all apostles?" If it should be allowed (which I should be unwilling to contradict) that in the case of some, perhaps in your case, there are some circumstances, which, taken in connection with the event of things, do evidently justify their acting in that way which some call irregular; it will not follow, therefore, that every young man who has a fair and peaceable right to expect ordination in the church, and a providential appointment to the pastorate of souls in a particular place, would do well to follow their steps.

It appears to me that a *pastoral charge* is a weighty thing, and that a minister who keeps much with his own people, watches over and warns them publicly, and from house to house; acquaints himself

with their situations, tempers, and temptations, and thereby knows how to speak a word in season to them, and is on the spot to guard them against the first symptoms of a declension, or the first appearance of error; I say, such a one appears to me in a competent sphere of duty. But if he admits engagements manifestly *inconsistent* with such a close and sedulous attention, he may appear more important to himself, or in the eyes of the world—but will not, upon the whole, be so useful. There is that in us by nature, which may dispose us to be well pleased at *aiming at great things*; and though I trust that many who set out as if they expected to convert whole countries, act from nobler motives, even a gracious concern for the glory of God, and the good of souls—yet *our own evil* is so deeply and closely entwined with the good which the Lord puts into our hearts, that I believe many who earnestly desire to promote the gospel interest, do in some respects hurt it, by overlooking all regard to order, treating the most express and positive engagements as not worthy of notice, drawing a sort of warrant thereby for any person to undertake any service, who thinks himself qualified for it.

As to yourself, my dear sir, my whole heart goes with you in your endeavors to serve the Lord; what he has done for you, and by you, are satisfactory proofs to me of your call. But I write thus to beg you not to make your own case a *precedent*; but when you meet with young men of right views and promising talents, who seem properly qualified to serve God in the *established church*, if they are ready to catch your fire, I would wish you rather to assist them with a *bridle* than a *spur*; advise them to follow the leading, and wait the openings of Providence; to begin with small things; and not to think their time lost, if the Lord should give them at first such an easy service as may afford them leisure for a close study of the Word of God and of their hearts, that they may come to be solid, scriptural, experimental, and judicious preachers, be furnished with an acceptable variety, and

prove, both to the church and the world, workmen who need not to be ashamed.

Some young men have been loose and raw preachers all their days, by thinking that a warm impression of a text of Scripture, and a compassionate feeling for the souls of sinners—are almost the only necessary requisites. When a young tree puts out *blossoms* in great abundance, the skillful gardener pulls many off, and, though he thereby lessens its fruitfulness for the present, he secures it for the future.

Letter 6

November 9, 1767

My dear friend,

I think we fully agree in our sentiments about *preachers*. The *gifts*, the *views*, the *services* of those who are sent and taught by the same Spirit—may be, and are in many respects, different. But if they are sent and taught by him, they will preach the same Jesus, they will equally confess their dependence on the Holy Spirit for their ability and success, and, more or less, he will own their ministrations, and give them living witnesses and seals that he has employed them in his work. Those who agree in these essentials, would do well to agree among themselves, and to wish each other prosperity in the name of the Lord.

When I see a competency of spiritual knowledge, and a humble frame of mind, I would not look further, nor inquire whether the instrument is a scholar or a gownsman, before I give him the right hand of fellowship. But I own, if people attempt to teach others what they very poorly understand themselves; or if the department savors of self-confidence and a desire of being noticed, I am ready to fear

that they run before they are sent. I wish that none of us who are called regular pastors, may affect to despise those who, from a principle of love to the Lord and to souls, think it right to become itinerants, and move more at large than we do. And I wish that none in your way would censure and condemn us for being incumbent upon what we conceive to be our proper work and charge—but sincerely believe we may have other reasons than the fear of man, or the love of ease, (though, alas! I know not to what charge I dare plead an absolute *Not guilty*,) for not choosing to depart from our present path, and to imitate yours.

I say I wish there may be this mutual candor on all sides; but if not, those will be happiest, who can bear the misapprehensions of their brethren without being either grieved or offended. It is a small thing to be judged by *men*. If the *Lord* condescends to smile upon us, and gives us to maintain a good conscience in his sight, so that we can humbly appeal to him that we aim at His glory—we may be content to bear anything else. *We shall all be of one mind before long!* In the mean time, may we ever remember, that not he who commends *himself* is approved—but whom the *Lord* commends.

I am glad you have been with H ____; I made no doubt but you would love my dear friend; possibly I may overrate him; I own he is but a man—but I think him an uncommon one; an eminent instance of the true Christian spirit. This is what is most taking with me. *Gifts* are useful; but they are mere tinsel compared with the solid gold of *grace*. An eminency in gifts is showy and glittering; but unless grace is proportional, gifts are very ensnaring. Gifts are like riches—if well improved, they give a man fairer opportunities of service; but if the Lord favors a man with great gifts, and in consequence thereof, considerable popularity—that man stands in a dangerous situation! If he is not kept humble—soon will be his fall. And to keep such a

gifted man humble, more than a common share of *trials* is usually needful. My prayer for you and for myself, my dear friend, is, that we may never infer *grace* from *gifts*, or to mistake the exercise of the one for the exercise of the other.

We have need to be saying continually, "Hold me up—and I shall be safe." How else can we stand? If we meet with *opposition*, it has hurt its thousands. If we are exposed to caresses and *popularity*, they have slain their *ten* thousands! Jesus alone is able to preserve us, and he is able to preserve us fully—in the lion's den, in the fiery furnace, in the swellings of Jordan—if he is with us, and maintains in us a sense of our unworthiness, and our entire dependence upon him—we shall be safe.

I see that, beside the general lot of affliction in common with others, you are likely to have one peculiar trial, which might be lightly regarded by some—but not by me. Indeed, I can sympathize with you; and, from what I have formerly felt, I am sure nothing but the grace of God can compose the mind under such a disappointment. But remember, he has given you himself. If he sees fit to overrule your desires, be sure it is best for you. *The Lord sees all consequences*; if we could do so, we would acquiesce in his appointments the first moment. If it is for your good and his glory, it shall yet take place; (you would not wish it otherwise,) if not, he can make it up, perhaps in kind; (for there is an old proverb, "That there is as good fish *in* the sea—as ever came *out* of it!") but if not so, he can easily make it up in kindness, and give you such a taste of his love that you shall gladly forego all, and say as David, "Whom do I have in heaven but You? And I desire nothing on earth but You!" Psalm 73:25.

Let other things turn out as he pleases, you must be happy, for the Lord himself is your Guide, your Shield, and your Portion. Keep your eye and heart, my friend, upon his work, and he will take care of your other affairs, and not withhold any good thing from you. All hearts are in his hands; when his time is come, hard things are made easy, and mountains sink into plains!

Letter 7

January 4, 1768

My dear friend,

My heart is as much with you, I trust, as it would be, had you been one of our ranks. And I would as willingly hear you in your usual places, as if you preached in St. Paul's Cathedral. But as I have already answered your letter, this, and more that I could offer from it, may be little more than repetition.

I hope the entrance of the new year will be blessed to you. The last was to me a year of peculiar mercies! But, alas! as to my part in it, I have little pleasure in the review. Alas! how much faintness and unfruitfulness has the Lord borne with from me! Indeed, I am almost continually a burden to myself, and find such a difference between what I seem to be in the pulpit and in public—and what I really feel myself to be before the Lord, that I am often amazed and confounded! And was it not that the Lord has been pleased in some measure to establish me in the knowledge of my justifying righteousness, and the unalterable security of his covenant of grace—I would be ready to give all up! I am kept at a great distance from the full possession of my privileges; but, through mercy, *the evils I feel are confined within myself*. The Lord keeps me from stumbling outwardly, and does not allow Satan to distress me with those

grievous temptations which he has always in readiness when permitted. I trust my hope is founded upon a rock, and that he to whom I have been enabled to commit my soul—will keep it to the end. Yet surely I am a wonder to myself!

Exercises of mind are common to all who know anything of themselves, and have some just views of their *obligations to redeeming love*. But those who preach to others—must expect a double portion. We need them in order to keep us humble, upon which, as a means, our success and comfort especially depend. We need them that we may know how to speak a word in season to weary souls. Innumerable are the trials, fears, troubles, and temptations which the Lord's people are beset with; some in one way, some in another. The minister must, as it were, have a taste of all of these—or it might happen that a case might come before him to which he had nothing to say. And we need them likewise to bring our hard hearts into a feeling disposition and *sympathy* with those who suffer, otherwise we would be too busy or too happy to attend unto their moans.

Surely much of that *hasty* and *ensorious* spirit, too often observable in *young converts*, arises from their having, as yet, a very imperfect acquaintance with *the deceitfulness of their own hearts*. But, the old weather-beaten Christian, who has learned by sorrowful experience how weak he is in himself, and what powerful subtle enemies he has to grapple with—acquires a tenderness in dealing with bruises and broken bones, which greatly conduces to his acceptance and usefulness to others. I desire, therefore, to be resigned and thankful, and to give myself up to the Lord to lead me in whatever way he sees best; only I am grieved, that it is so much his appointment to keep me thus low—as it is the necessary consequence of my own folly and remissness.

Letter 8

My dear friend,

From what I have heard, I suppose this will not come premature to congratulate you on the accomplishment of your wishes. If the late *Miss C* ____ is now *Mrs. S* ____ , we present our warmest wishes of happiness to you both in your marriage union—a union in which, I trust, you will both see the effect of his love and favor who has previously, by his grace, united you to himself. I was much pleased when you first mentioned your views to me; for I thought you were remarkably suited and fitted for each other, and I had a good hope from the beginning, that the difficulties which seemed at first to occur, would in due time subside. I rejoice with you therefore; yet, as one who knows that the *sweetest* connections in the present life are attended with their proportional *cares* and *abatements*.

No one has more reason to speak with thankfulness and satisfaction of the *marriage state* than myself. It has been, and is, to me, the best and dearest of *temporal* blessings; but I have found a balance, at least an abatement, in the innumerable inquietudes and painful sensations which at times it has cost me. So it must be in the present state; we shall, in one way or another, feel that *vanity* is interwoven in every circumstance of life. And it is needful that we should feel it—to correct that proneness in our hearts to rest in creatures. However, the God of all grace has promised to sanctify the changes we pass through, and he will not afflict us without a cause, or without a blessing. Upon your entrance on a new way of life, you will probably find that the enemy will change the manner and method of his attacks; he suits himself to our occasions and situations. With such an amiable partner, your chief danger perhaps will lie in *being too happy*. Alas! the deceitfulness of our hearts, in a time of prosperity,

exposes us to the greatest of evils—to wander from the *fountain of living waters*—and to sit down by *broken cisterns*.

Permit me to hint to you, yes, to both of you, *Beware of idolatry!* I have smarted for it; it has distressed me with many imaginary fears, and cut me out much cause of real humiliation and grief. I would hope that others are not so ungrateful and insensible as I am; but for myself, I have chiefly found, that the things which I have accounted my *choice mercies*, when I have seen the hand and tasted the goodness of the Lord the most sensibly—have been the principal occasions of drawing out the evils of my heart, seducing me into backsliding frames, and causing me to walk heavily and in darkness! And this moment, should the Lord visit me with breach upon breach, and bring the thing that I most fear upon me—I must justify him; for *I have turned all his blessings into occasions of sin*—and perhaps those most upon which my heart has set the highest value.

Yet still I must congratulate you. So sure as you are *joined*—you must *part*—and such separations are hard to flesh and blood; but it will only be a separation for a little time. You will walk together as fellow-heirs of eternal life, helpmeets and partakers of each other's spiritual joys, and at length you shall meet before the throne of glory, and be forever with the Lord! May you live under the influence of these views, and find every *sweet* made still sweeter—by the shining of the Sun of Righteousness upon your souls; and every *cross* sanctified to lead you to a nearer, more immediate, and more absolute dependence on himself. For this I hope frequently to pray, and I entreat your joint prayers for us. To which I must add, my hope and expectation, that if ever occasions should call you into these parts, you will certainly give us the pleasure of receiving you both at our home.

Your experiences and mine seem something alike, only you appear to me to have a more lively sense both of *sin* and *grace* than I have attained. Perhaps you think differently. It is a question that can be decided only by Him who searches our hearts. But it matters not who is best or worst, since Jesus is necessary and sufficient for both. I trust he is my righteousness and strength, and that I do not deliberately look for either elsewhere. But the old leaven—a tendency to the covenant of works, still cleaves to me, and my judgment (imperfect as it is) is much clearer than my experience. I think I can point out the *way of holiness* to others—but I find it not easy to walk in it myself. However, I am learning to cease from complaints, unless to the Lord, and would rather invite my friends to join me in praising his goodness and grace. I am not what I desire to be—but there is a period coming, when I shall be so, yes, more than my heart can conceive! I hope to see Jesus, to be like him, and with him forever!

Letter 9

November 14, 1768

My dear sir,

Your last letter (which I am glad to find is without a date) gave me much pleasure. As the Lord has shown you where your dangers lie, and has revealed himself to you as your wisdom and strength, I doubt not but you shall be led in the path of *duty* and *safety*. Sometimes, indeed, he lets us *stumble and trip*—to increase our circumspection and humiliation, to keep us sensible of our nothingness, and to endear to us the name of Jesus, our gracious Advocate.

It is difficult to preserve a right frame of spirit, in our necessary interaction with temporal things; so as not to *overvalue* or *undervalue* the many tokens of his love, with which he is pleased to surround us. But, though the lesson is hard, and we are dull scholars—our Master is able to teach us all things that concern our comfort and his glory; and he has promised he will teach us. Indeed, we are in *his school* from morning to night; every occurrence of every day, all that passes within and without, has a voice, and a suitableness to advance our proficiency. The providences that affect ourselves, our families, and our acquaintances; the workings of our own hearts, the conduct of others before our eyes, whether good or evil—all concur to *expound* and *illustrate* the Word of God, and what we there read concerning the two great mysteries of *sin* and *grace*. The best exposition of divine truth is always before us; and we may read and study it when we lie down or rise up; when we sit in the house, or when we walk along the way. In this way, though we are slow to learn—yet the Lord enables us to get forward a little. And *in proportion as we advance, we see more of Christ's beauty, fullness and sufficiency, and the emptiness and vanity of everything else.*

Wherever this letter may find you, I hope it will find you just where, and just as the Lord would have you to be; casting all your care on him, and having nothing much at heart but to know his will, and cheerfully to comply with it. This is a happy frame; for they that thus trust in the Lord, shall never be moved—they shall not be afraid of evil tidings—he will guide them by his eye, direct all their paths, and give them his testimony in their consciences that their ways are acceptable in his sight.

Letter 10

May 20, 1769

My dear sir,

I am more sorry than surprised, that you are constrained to leave the army. I was apprehensive from the first, that, sooner or later, this would be the case. However, as I know you have acted with a simple view to the glory of God and the good of souls—I trust he will give you the reward of those that suffer for righteousness sake. May he now make you a blessing wherever he shall be pleased to fix or send you, and give you many seals to your labors, that you, and all about you, may rejoice in your present situation. And as you are not now under either military or ecclesiastical restraints, I doubt not but you will gladly spend and be spent for his sake. The campaign is short; the victory already secured—we have but a few skirmishes to pass through; and then, he who has promised to make us more than conquerors, will put a crown of eternal life upon our heads!

We were truly concerned to hear of your wife's illness—but hope your next will inform us of a happy recovery. I know how to sympathize with you in this matter. When we have had such views of the world, that we are in a measure weaned from all connections but one; when we have (if I may so speak) but *one gourd* in which we rejoice—how do our spirits flutter when we think a *worm* is touching its root! I have been a grievous idolater, and have loved my wife to a sinful excess; yet, through marvelous mercy, we are both spared to this day. But how often has the Lord punished us in each other; what anxiety and distress have I at times endured, for lack of faith to trust my dearest concerns in his hand who does all things well; and for lack of that moderation, with respect to all things below the skies, which befits those who are called with the high and holy calling of the gospel.

Such is the effect of our depravity, that we are almost sure either to *undervalue* or *overvalue* the temporal blessings which we enjoy. But the Lord is good; he knows our frame, pities our weakness—and, when he corrects, it is with the affection of a father. I hope he will spare you to be long *comforts* and *helpmeets* to each other—yet knowing how happily you are united, I cannot help, when I recollect how I have smarted, giving you a gentle admonition, *Beware of idolatry!* He, who in mercy brought you together, will not needlessly grieve you. He loves you both, unspeakably better than you love each other—and therefore you may safely commit health and life, body and soul, into his keeping. Pray for me that I may myself learn the lesson I would prescribe to you; for though it is easy to *talk* and *write* while all things are *smooth*—yet when the trial has returned, and I have been brought to a pinch—I have still found that I had yet much to learn; and that when *judgment* is tolerably clear—the actual *experience* and *feeling* of the heart may be sadly mixed and disturbed.

As to your *soul complaints*, I might transcribe them, and send them back in my name. I seem to have all the causes of grief and shame that are common to others; and not a few, that I am ready to think peculiar to myself. But, through mercy, I can also follow you in what you say of the *all-sufficiency of Jesus*. His blood, righteousness, intercession, and unchangeable love, keep me from giving way to the conclusions which Satan and unbelief would sometimes force upon me. It is He who must do all *for* me, *by* me, and *in* me. I long to live more above the influence of a legal spirit and an unbelieving heart. But, indeed, I groan being burdened. I have no reason to complain of a lack of liberty in public—but I wish I could be more affected to see poor sinners hardening under the sound of the gospel. I am afraid that if I am enabled to fill up my preaching hour, and to come off with tolerable acceptance, I am too easily satisfied. Indeed, this is a

mercy which demands my thankfulness; but my great concern should be—that neither my preaching, nor their hearing, may be in vain. However, may the Lord grant me to be faithful!

Letter 11

January 19, 1773

My dear friend,

The *heart evils* of which we mutually complain, are the effects of a fallen nature; and though we *feel* them, if the Lord gives us grace to be *humbled* for them, if they make us more vile in our own eyes, and make Jesus more precious to our hearts—they shall not hurt us—but rather, we may rank them among the all things that shall work for our good. All our *soul complaints* amount but to this—that we are very sick; and if we did not find ourselves to be so—we would not duly prize the infallible Physician. Our *perverseness* and *stubbornness*, illustrate his compassion and tenderness! By whatever mournful experience we learn of the deceitfulness of our own hearts, qualifies us the better to speak to the case of others, and to offer a word of warning, exhortation, and consolation to his people! There is no *school* but this in which we can acquire the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season to those who are weary, or be preserved from the pride, vanity, and self-righteousness which would otherwise defile all our best services!

It is better of the two that we should have cause of being covered with shame and confusion of face before the Lord; than, for lack of a due sense of the evils within us—be allowed to grow proud in our own conceits, as we certainly would—when the Lord is pleased to give us some liberty and success in our public work—unless we were ballasted with the mortifying conviction of what we are in ourselves!

Yet I hope he will enable us to watch and pray against any actual backsliding of heart. The remembrance of what we have already suffered in this respect, may suffice to remind us that we *are* nothing, *have* nothing, and can *do* nothing—but by his power working in us. If he is pleased to keep our eye and our heart simply dependent upon him, his good Word provides us with ample encouragement against the remnants of indwelling sin, which will cleave to us while we are in the body. We are complete in him. Our righteousness is in heaven. We have an Advocate with the Father. We are not under the law—but under grace. In a little while—all sins, temptations, clouds, and veils—shall be done away with forever!

I find that many of my problems arise more from the spirit of *self*, than I was formerly aware of. *SELF*, as well as *Satan*, can transform itself into an angel of light. To mourn over sin is right; but I do not always rightly mourn over it. Too often a part of my grief has been, a weariness of being so entirely dependent upon Jesus, of being continually indebted to him for fresh and multiplied forgiveness. I would have liked better to have some stock, ability, and power of my own, that I might do a little without him; that I might sometimes come before him as a *saint*, as a *servant* that has done his duty—and not perpetually as a *poor worthless sinner*. Oh, that I could be content with what is, and must be, my proper character; that I could live more simply upon the freeness and fullness of his grace!

There is no sin more to be dreaded, than the great sin of thinking we can do something holy, without a fresh application of the blood of sprinkling to our consciences, and a renewed communication of his Spirit to our hearts. This life of faith is the life of Christ in the heart. "Not I," says the apostle, "but Christ lives in me. His strength is made perfect in my weakness." I am nothing—He is all. This is foolishness to the world; but faith sees a glory in it. This way is best for *our*

safety—and most for *his honor*. And the more simply we can reduce all our efforts to this one point, "Looking unto Jesus!" —the more peace, fervor, and liveliness we shall find in our hearts, and the more success we shall feel in striving against sin in all its branches.

Eight Letters to a Friend

Letter 1

July 30, 1767

Dear sir,

Your letter gave me much pleasure, and increases my desire (if it is the Lord's will) of having you so near to us. As I hope it will not be long before I have the pleasure of seeing you, I shall be the less solicitous if my frequent engagements should constrain me to close before my paper is filled up. I can only advise you to resist, to the utmost, every dark and discouraging suggestion. The Lord has done great things for you, and wonderfully appeared in your behalf already; take encouragement from hence, to hope that he will not forsake the work of his own hands; Judges. 13:23. There is much weight in the apostle's argument in Romans 5:10.

Surely he who showed us mercy before we asked it, will not withhold it now he has taught us how to plead for it agreeably to his own will. Though sin has abounded in us—grace has superabounded in him; though our enemies are many and mighty—Jesus is above them all; though he may hide himself from us at times for a moment—he has given us a warrant to trust in him, even while we walk in darkness, and has promised to return and gather us with everlasting mercies.

The Christian life is easy and clear in *theory*—but not without much care and difficulty, can it be reduced to *practice*. Things appear quite otherwise, when *felt experimentally*, to what they do when only read in a book. Many learn the art of sailing (as it is called) by the fire-side at home—but when they come to sea, with their heads full of rules, and without experience, they find that the art is only to be thoroughly learned upon the spot. So, to renounce self, to live upon Jesus, to walk with God, to overcome the world, to hope against hope, to trust the Lord's heart, when we cannot trace his hand; and to know that our duty and privilege consist in these things, may be readily acknowledged or quickly learned. But, upon repeated trial, we find, that *saying* and *doing* are two different things.

We think at setting out, that we sit down and count the cost; but, alas! our views are so superficial at first, that we have occasion to correct our estimate daily! For every day shows as some new thing in the heart, or some new turn in the management of the war against us, which we were not aware of; and upon these accounts, discouragements may arise so high as to bring us (I speak for myself) to the very point of throwing down our arms, and making either a *tame surrender* or a *shameful flight*. Thus it would be with us at last—if the Lord Almighty were not on our side. But though our enemies thrust sore at us that we might fall—Jesus has been our stay. And if he is the captain of our salvation; if his eye is upon us, his arm stretched out around us, and his ear open to our cry, and if he has engaged to teach our hands to war, and our fingers to fight, and to cover our heads in the day of battle—then we need not fear, though an army rises up against us! But, lifting up our banner in his name, let us go forth conquering and to conquer! "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you!" Romans 16:20.

We hope we shall all be better acquainted soon. We please ourselves with agreeable prospects and proposals; but the determination is with the Lord. We may rejoice that it is so—for he sees all things in their dependencies and connections, which we see not, and therefore he often thwarts our wishes—for our good. But if any measure we have in view would, upon the whole, promote our comfort, or his glory—he will surely bring it to pass in answer to prayer, however improbable it might appear; for he delights in the satisfaction and prosperity of his people, and without a *need-be*, they would never be in heaviness. Let us strive and pray for a habitual resignation to his will—for he does all things well. It is never ill with us—but when our evil hearts doubt or forget this plainest of truths!

I beg an interest in your prayers, and that you will believe me to be, dear sir, your affectionate servant.

Letter 2

February 22, 1770

My very dear friend,

We were all glad to find that the Lord had given you a good journey, and that he is pleased to support and comfort you with his presence; and that we all sympathized with you in your present trial, and are greatly interested in your brother's illness. Prayer is made both for him and you among us publicly, and from house to house. And as you know we have had repeated cause to say, *He is a God who hears prayer*, we hope that our prayers in this behalf likewise will open a door for praise.

And now may the Lord direct my pen, that I may send you what Philip Henry calls, "*A word upon the wheels!*" a word in season for your refreshment and encouragement. I rejoice and I mourn with

you. The little acquaintance I have had with your brother, (independently of his relation to you,) has given him a place in my heart and esteem; and I can form some judgment of what you must feel at the apprehension of losing so near and dear a friend. But though he is brought very low, and physicians can afford little assistance, "to God the Lord belong the issues of life and death." He can speak a recovering word at the last extremity; and what he can do—he certainly will do—if it is best upon the whole.

But if he has otherwise determined, he can enable you to resign the loss of your brother—and can answer your desires in what is of still greater importance than *prolonging the natural life*. Considering how much his best interest is laid upon your heart, the pleasure he expressed at your arrival, his willingness to hear your prayers for him, and the liberty you find to improve every opportunity of speaking, I am willing to hope, that you will be made a messenger of light and peace to his soul. The Lord's hand is not shortened that he cannot save. *He can do great things—in a small time*—as you know from your own experience. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he can command light to shine out of darkness. If he but speaks—it is done!

Your brother's amiable character and moral deportment would undoubtedly be to his advantage, if he were to stand before a human judge; but we know that we have to do with a God who searches the heart, and to the demands of whose holy inflexible law, the whole world must plead *guilty*—and cast themselves entirely upon his mercy in Christ, or be eternally confounded. This we cannot make one another understand—but the Lord can convince us of it in an instant; and then how plain, how pleasing, how welcome is the *gospel method of salvation by free grace* in the blood of Jesus! One glimpse of the worth of the soul, the evil of sin, and the importance of

eternity—will effect that which has been in vain attempted by repeated arguments. I hope the Lord will be with your heart and mouth, and that he will afford you the opportunity, and direct your words to your brother's heart. Perhaps now you may be heard when you touch upon your own most singular case, and declare the manner and the effects of the Lord's wonderful dealing with yourself, which, as it cannot be argued, so neither can it be accounted for upon any other principles than those of the Scripture, respecting the power, grace, and all-sufficiency of Jesus to save to the uttermost!

You may perceive I would willingly help you if I could, though I know the attempt is needless, for the Lord is with you; and though I feel my own poverty in the endeavor; accept it, however, as a token of my affection, and as a proof that my heart is warmly engaged with yours in your present concern.

I was sorry to be prevented accompanying you to W ____, but I found afterwards it was right; you were better engaged, and I would but have only interrupted you. I was with you, however, in spirit, as I returned alone in the carriage, which were two of the most pleasant hours I have known for some time. I preached that evening at Weston, from Deuteronomy 32:9-12; a passage which exhibits the history of a believer in miniature—the Christian life in a nutshell. The night was stormy, so that we had but few people.

Two people who were well the day you left us—have since died. One of them has already been buried—a poor profane creature, suddenly cut off in the prime of life! The other man was young, jovial, jesting, and thoughtless. He became sick on Saturday—and died on Monday evening! Oh, my friend, what do we owe to the grace of God, that we were not cut off in the days of ignorance—as so many have been! Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!

Believe me to be, your most affectionate and obliged.

Letter 3

March 8, 1770

My dear sir,

While it is the Lord's pleasure that we should be separated, I would be thankful for the convenience of post-office, by which we can exchange a few thoughts, and let each other know how we go on. You are remembered by me, not only jointly with the church—but in my family and in secret; and, indeed, there are not many hours in the day when I do not feel your absence and the occasion of it. I hear that your brother is little better; but it is an encouragement to know that he is no worse. His disorder is alarming and dangerous; but, though physicians and friends can do little, there is a Great Physician to whom all cases are equally easy—and whose *compassion* is equal to his *power*. If he who does all things well sees it best—he can and he will restore him! If not, he is able to give him such a view of what is beyond the grave, as would make him desirous to depart, and to be with Christ; and make you perfectly willing to resign him.

This is my prayer—that he may find that *to live is Christ—and to die is gain!* For this I commend him to Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, who has overcome death, and Him who has the power of death, and is exalted to save to the *uttermost*. That word *uttermost* has an extensive meaning—it includes a conquest over all difficulties, and a supply of all that is necessary. How totally, and (if possible) how often, would I have been lost—had not Jesus engaged to save me to the uttermost. And many a time I think I would have given up all hope—but for those two texts, his own gracious declaration, "Him who comes unto me—I will *never* cast out!" and

the apostle's assertion, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, that "He is able to save to the uttermost!" "Never!" takes in all possible characters. "To the uttermost!" reaches to all possible circumstances. He can enlighten the most ignorant, soften the most obdurate, support the most tempted, comfort the most distressed, pardon the most guilty. Oh, may his precious name be engraved upon our hearts, and sound sweeter than music to our ears—for he has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and will save to the uttermost in defiance of all our sins, fears, and enemies!

Your present trials are great; but God is faithful—and will not allow you to be overpowered. Your consolations at such seasons are great likewise. I know the *hour of conflict* is sharp—but the victory in which it terminates is sweet! Your conjectures how Mr. ____ and myself would behave under a fiery trial, are highly precarious, and seem to depend upon a supposition which, though it may steal into our thoughts, has no place in either of our judgments, namely—that some believers have an *inherent power* which other Christians do not possess—which will appear in exercise whenever it is needed.

Undoubtedly, Mr. ____ , if left to himself in similar cases, would do as Job, Jeremiah, and Jonah have done before us. The *grace of the promise* is and shall be sufficient for our support; but while you are borne up by a power above your own—it is right and fit that you should feel *your own weakness*. It must and it will be so with all to whom the Lord has given that frame of spirit, in which he delights. As to myself, my very heart sinks at the apprehension of sharp trials. The Lord has long dealt with a *marvelous accommodation to my weakness* in this respect; what supports me when I anticipate them, is a persuasion of his nearness, faithfulness, and all-sufficiency! But I know there is a great difference between viewing the battle at a *distance*—and being actually engaged in it! This I find, that in my

present calm and easy situation, *I have not a grain of strength to spare!*

And, when I think of the questions, "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out—how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country—how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?" Jer. 12:5, I can only say, "*Be my strong tower whereunto I may continually resort!*"

In a word, *trials* would not deserve the name—nor could they answer the ends for which they are sent—if we did not feel them! They are not, they cannot be joyous while present—but grievous! But in the end, they shall surely yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The God whom you serve is able to support and deliver you, and I trust you shall have cause to praise him for this also, as you know you have—for those through which he has already brought you, 2 Cor. 1:3-11.

William C ____ is one of those who have been lately visited with the festering fever and sore throat. He had been for some time (longer than I knew of) under a concern about his soul. His illness brought him to the brink of the grave. But the Lord has been gracious to him, not only in sparing his life—but in filling him with peace and consolation to a degree he is not able to express. He now rejoices with the joy of an *inexperienced soldier*, who is little aware of what he may meet with in the course of the war, and seems hardly to understand us, when we bid him expect changes and difficulties in the Christian life; for his mountain stands so strong, that he thinks he shall never be moved. Thus it is—nothing but *experience* can teach us the lesson, which in words is so plainly set before us—that *through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom*. But the Lord knows and pities our weakness, and shows us the nature of the Christian life, by degrees, as we are able to bear it.

Believe me most cordially yours.

Letter 4

My dear sir,

Since the news from Mr. C ____ , we await the mail with concern; the accounts we received yesterday, give me a very lively idea of your situation, while you are expecting so critical and dangerous an hour as that which you have in view. I can, and I do feel for you—yet I know you are and shall be supported. Prayer is made without ceasing among us—for both you and *your brother*. And we know and believe that the Lord, on whom we call, is rich in mercy, and mighty to save. We see many among us—who have been *restored from the gates of the grave* in answer to prayer—when the *healing arts of medicine* had proved utterly ineffectual. This encourages us to hope that our prayers shall terminate in praises to the Lord, to whom belong the issues of life and death. In the mean time, I am glad to drop a word that might afford you some *consolation* in your present trial. I have just arisen from my knees, to take the pen in hand—may the Lord be with my heart in writing—and with yours in reading what may occur to me.

I drank tea last night with Mr. ____ I had sent him my book a few days before, and I found he had read it about half through. I expected he would say something about it, and he did. Though he seemed to perceive and approve the main design, and to be pleased with what he had read—yet I suppose many things were not much to his purpose. What he chiefly fixed on was, the second chapter, and he told me the description I had given of the gospel was exactly suited to the state, the needs, and desires of his mind; that he had read it twice over, and found much comfort from it. This gave me pleasure. He is,

as you know, a man much exercised with a sense of the evils of his heart, and therefore I account him a competent judge. I hope I would rather be instrumental to the peace and consolation of one such person, than honored with the applause of thousands who live at their ease.

Since I left him, I have been led into some reflections on the admirable suitableness of the *gospel way of salvation by Jesus Christ*, to all the possible varieties of a sinner's condition. When once he knows himself, and is acquainted with the holiness, justice, and majesty of the God with whom he has to do—no other solution can ever satisfy him, or give peace to his conscience. And when once he knows Christ as the only way, and receives saving faith—he is provided with an answer to every discouragement and fear that can arise. And here people of every age, country, character, situation, and capacity, unite and agree. Their views of themselves, of the Savior, of the ground of their acceptance with God, and of the communion with God which the Scripture speaks of, are so similar, that many think they learn them one of another, which is indeed sometimes true with respect to the influence of means, (God having appointed to diffuse the knowledge of salvation by his blessing on preaching, etc.). Yet every one of them is taught of God, and receives personally for himself an inimitable conviction, which, as it cannot be easily described so as to be understood by those who have not experienced it, (for which reason it is compared in the Scripture to *tasting*, Psalm 34:8, and 1 Peter. 2:3,) so all attempts to refuting it, are like attempting (as we commonly say) to persuade us out of our senses.

I remember that, three or four years ago, I mentioned some part of the gospel truth to a gentleman who called on me here, and he answered, "If it is a truth—you are indebted for it to *Calvin*." As well might he have said, because Calvin had seen the *sun*, and has

mentioned it in his writings, we build our knowledge of its light and influence, upon his testimony.

These gospel truths are acknowledged throughout the world, whenever there is an eye to behold them. Here the king and the clown, the philosopher and the savage—are upon a level. And Occam, the Indian, in describing to me the state of his heart when he was a blind idolater—gave me, in general, a striking picture of what my own was, in the early part of my life; and his subsequent views of the gospel corresponded with mine as face answers to face in a looking-glass, though I dare say, when he received them, he had never heard of Calvin's name!

I am sure I can say for myself, that I did not receive not the gospel from *man*. The little instruction I had received in my youth—I had renounced; I was an *infidel* in the strictest sense of the word. When it pleased God to give me a concern for my soul, and for some years afterwards, I was upon the seas, or in Africa, at a distance from the influence of books, names, and parties. In this space, the Lord taught me, by reading the New Testament—the truths upon which my soul now ventures its everlasting concerns, when I did not know there was a person upon earth who had the same views with myself, or at least did not know where to find such a person! Perhaps, I may rather say, I took it for granted that all people who were religious, were of my mind, and hardly suspected that any who professed a regard to the Bible, could doubt or deny what to me appeared so plain.

Your case likewise has been pretty much like my own. How different were your views when you left, compared to what you had when you went there; and how little did *men* contribute to that difference! These things I am sure of: that the proper wages of sin is death; that I

and all mankind have sinned against the great God; that the most righteous person is unable to stand the trial of God's holy law. When I saw things in this light, I saw the *necessity of a Mediator*. And in the account the Scripture gave me of Christ, his adorable person, his astonishing offices, his matchless love, humiliation, obedience, and death—I saw a provision answerable to my need. His blood is declared to be a complete atonement for sin; his righteousness is a plea provided for the guilty; his power and compassion are both infinite; and the promise of pardon, peace, and eternal life, is made to them who savingly believe him. He himself is exalted to bestow that faith to which the promises belong, and he will give it to all who ask. This I have found to be very different from the intellectual assent we give to a fact of history! This changes the views, dispositions, desires, and pursuits of the mind! This produces that great effect, which is emphatically called, *being born again*; without which, our Lord assures us, no man can see the kingdom of God, whatever his qualifications may be in other respects.

Oh, my friend, let us praise the Lord who has enlightened our dark understandings, subdued that natural enmity we felt against his government and his grace, and has given us the hope of eternal glory! Now we are enabled to trust in him; now we find a measure of stability in the midst of a changing world; now we can look forward to death and judgment with composure, knowing *whom* we have believed, and that we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Having little news to communicate, I have let my thoughts run at random upon the subject you best love. My letters, so far as they are not taken up with necessary occurrences, are concerning the love and grace of our adorable Redeemer. Oh, to think *what we were*—when he showed us mercy; what great things he has done, and is preparing

for us, and that he so loved us as to wash us from our sins in his own blood! These are themes suited to warm our hearts, to bear us up under all our troubles, and to fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory! Oh, that my heart may take fire as I write! Surely I am in my better judgment persuaded, that life is not worth living—but as affording opportunity to spread the savoir of his name, to set him forth in my ministry, for the comfort of his people and the salvation of poor sinners. I trust you pray for me that I may be faithful; that I may give myself wholly to this service, and, by continuing in it—save myself and those who hear me!

I am inviolably yours.

Letter 5

March 15, 1770

My dear friend,

Though I have hardly time to write, I cannot be silent upon this occasion. You will easily judge what satisfaction your letter gave us. Blessed be God—the God who answers prayer, and who alone does marvelous things. I rejoice with you; I rejoice with your brother. Now, a chief point in our prayers will give place to *praises*, and we shall have the sweetest encouragement to continue praying for the re-establishment of his health. If we had broadcast the good news, how quickly would it have flown over the town. But we have thought it best to keep it to ourselves a few days. When we shall meet on Tuesday evening, I purpose to impart it to the people in a body, by reading your letter; my heart jumps at representing to myself, how they will look, how they will feel, how they will pray and give thanks—when they hear *what God has wrought!* I am willing to hope we shall have a comfortable and memorable evening. In the mean time,

there is some self-denial in keeping the secret; for myself, I feel it at my tongue's end continually, and am ready to speak of it to everyone I see—but we think, upon the whole, it will do better to come to them when all gathered together.

You need not wonder if, upon this very affecting and important occasion, the enemy attempts his utmost to disturb you. He fears for his kingdom, which has already received many severe shocks—in the increase the Lord has lately given to his gospel; he sees a new instrument raising up (as we hope) to deliver souls out of his power; he knows how nearly you are concerned in these things, and therefore, so far as he is permitted, will give you trouble. And you may be assured there are wise reasons for his having such a permission—but all your *conflicts* shall lead to *consolation*, and end in *victory*—and at last you shall be more than a conqueror.

General Wolfe conquered—but died upon the field of battle. *Hannibal* was a famous and a frequent conqueror—yet at length was vanquished by his foes. But the believer shall so conquer at the close of the campaign—that he shall never hear the sound of war any more; he shall so conquer in time—as to triumph to eternity. This we owe to Jesus; we overcome not by our own might—but by the blood of the Lamb, and by the Word of his testimony. He has conquered for us, and goes before us; and fights in us by his Spirit; and in his own time he will bruise Satan under our feet. In the mean while, he will be your strength and your shield; your song and your salvation. In his name you may lift up your banner, and bid defiance to Satan and all his hosts!

Remember me affectionately to your brother. I can truly say, I esteemed him, I loved him before; but my regard has been increased by the share I have taken in his concerns during his illness. And how

much more is he dear to me, since I know that we are united in the *love of the truth*. With what pleasure shall I now receive him! Now the restraints we were mutually under, for fear of giving each other offense, are removed. I think, when the Lord permits us all to meet here again together, we shall have much to say on the subject of redeeming love; much to ascribe to the wisdom, power, and goodness of a wonder-working God, who causes light to shine out of darkness, and has given us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the person of Jesus Christ. What an amazing change in our state, in our heart, in our views—is the result of this discovery! Old things pass away—all things become new! Then we see how unavoidably we must be wondered at—by all who have not experienced the same things, and we are content to be so for his sake who has loved us, and to account his cross our glory!

Believe me to be, my dear sir, most affectionately yours, in the nearest and strongest bond of friendship.

Letter 6

Charles Square, April 29, 1780

My dear friend,

I hope, when the weather will not allow you to be all day in the garden, that you are preparing a letter for me.

The recovery of my arm has advanced happily without interruption. I can now put on my overcoat, am almost done with my sling, and hope, in a few days more, to be released from the bandages. Blessed be the Lord, my best Physician and Friend, my *present and all-sufficient Help!* I have seen no reason yet to regret *my fall*, nor have I been permitted to do it; yet I may consider it as a *chastisement*, though of a gentle and merciful kind. A sinner need not spend much

time in searching out the cause of an affliction; but that the afflictions of such a sinner as I, should be so seldom, so moderate, so soon removed, depends upon reasons which I would never have known—but by the Word of God. There I am taught to spell his name, "The Lord, the Lord God, long-suffering, abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;" and thus I read *the reason why I am not consumed*.

The *spring*, long retarded, begins to force its way, and to make its appearance in the trees which surround our square. The field behind our garden seems as green as your meadows, and the cows that are feeding in it, have very much the look of country cows. In other respects, our situation is, upon the whole, very well.

But indeed, the moving away of two such dear friends is a trial, and gives me at times a mental feeling, something analogous to what my body felt when my arm was forced from its socket. I live in hopes that this mental dislocation will one day be happily reduced likewise, and that we shall come together again as bone to its bone. The connection which the Lord himself formed between us, was undoubtedly formed for *eternity*—but I trust we shall have more of the pleasure and comfort of it in *time*. And that I shall yet hear you say, "Come, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together, for he has turned my mourning into joy, and he has taken off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness!"

I have little idea as to the state of things in the world—for I seldom see a **newspaper** for two weeks together. And when I do, I meet with so little to encourage me, that I prefer a state of ignorance, which gives me more scope for hoping for the best. The prevalence of wickedness and spiritual insensibility, however, forces itself upon my notice, whether I want or not. And I am afraid, in the contentions

which are fomenting and spreading throughout the kingdom—I see such seeds of trouble, as were sown in the early part of Charles the First's reign, and which quickly produced such plentiful crops of confusion and misery! Yes, I am afraid that the present times are worse! There is an equal degree of party rage, without any portion of the public spirit, which undoubtedly influenced many individuals in those days. The *pretenses* on each side are but a thin veil, through which it is easy to perceive that the contest is chiefly between the ins and the outs, and that while some plead for arbitrary power, under the name of constitutional prerogative; others, who clamor for *liberty*, mean nothing better by the word than *licentiousness*.

So that, if my calling as a Christian would permit me to take an active part in this uproar, (which, in my view, it does not,) I must still remain neutral, until I could find more men of principle on one side or the other to associate with. I must be content to look on, and patiently wait the outcome, and should be ready to sink with apprehension—but for three supporting considerations:

1. That the Lord reigns, and will surely accomplish his own wise and gracious purposes.
2. That, in the midst of all this confusion, he is manifestly spreading the light of his gospel, and gathering sinners into his fold. While he maintains and multiplies the means of grace among us, and increases the number of praying souls to stand in the breach, I think we have a pledge that we shall not be given up, that our motto will be no worse than, *Cast down—but not destroyed*.
3. There is a third, a personal ground of comfort. He has said that it shall be well with those who fear Him—and his Word is sure. His people have properly nothing to *lose*, and nothing to *fear*—for he is their sun and shield, and exceeding great reward. His power,

providence, presence, and all-sufficiency, will lead them *safely*, and, upon the whole, *comfortably*, through every possible change, and bring them to their unchangeable rest!

My wife sends her best love. She has very tolerable health. I was at first afraid that her concerns, on account of my fall, would have brought a return of all her nervous illness. I felt more for her than for myself, while the four men were almost displacing my bones which were right, in order to put that one bone right which was out of place. But, while I was in the attitude, I may say with Nehemiah, "So I prayed unto the God of heaven;" I prayed for her, and the Lord heard me. She was at first exceedingly terrified, and felt the effects of the shock for a little time—but I hope they are quite subsided.

I am, dearest sir, your most affectionate and obliged.

Letter 7

Charles Square, May 6, 1780

My dear sir,

You will have no reason to apply to me, Luke 7:32, "We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry." For, when you pipe, I am ready to dance; and, when you mourn, a cloud comes over my brow, and a *tear* stands a tip-toe in my eye. I observe your letters usually begin and end in the *allegro* strain, and you put the more serious part in the middle—as this seems the fittest place for it, I will try to imitate you, though it will be something, if either my *beginning* or my *close* should entitle me to your smile, except you smile at the presumption of your humble imitator, and recollect the fable of the *frog* who tried to imitate the *ox*!

Do not wonder that I prize your letters. Besides the merit which friendship puts on them, as being yours, you always send me something that I would value from a stranger. Some thoughts in your last letter—I shall be the better for. How wonderful is that *tincture*, that *inexpressible something*, which gives your sentiments, when you speak of yourself, so gloomy a cast, while, in all other respects, it leaves your faculties in full bloom and rigor! How strange that your judgment should be clouded in one point only, and that a point so obvious and strikingly clear to everybody who knows you! How strange that a person who considers the earth, the planets, and the sun itself as *mere baubles*, when compared with the friendship and favor of God their Maker—should think the God who inspired him with such an idea, could ever forsake and cast off the soul which he has taught to love him! How strange is it, I say, that you should hold tenaciously to *both parts of a contradiction!* Though your comforts have been so long suspended, I know not that I ever saw you for a single day since your calamity came upon you, in which I could not perceive as clear and satisfactory evidence, that the grace of God was with you, as I could in your brighter and happier times. In the midst of all the little amusements, which you call trifling, and which I would be very thankful you can attend to, in your present circumstances, it is as easy to see who has your heart, and which way your desires tend—as to see your *shadow* when you stand in the sun!

I have a little back-parlor, which bears the name of my study. It is at present much unfurnished, and I must beg you, therefore, to send me a few pictures to ornament the walls. My bandage is taken off, and my arm almost in *status quo*. I wish to be thankful to Him who makes sore—and binds up; who wounds—and whose hands make whole.

Accept our best love, and believe me to be, most affectionately yours.

Letter 8

Charles Square, Hoxton,

June 3, 1780

My dear friend,

On Monday we went to Greenwich, and returned today in time to preach my monthly sermon in the forenoon. I have much to be thankful for, and particularly that my wife was well all the time. Two very agreeable hours I spent alone in the park, a situation which I think is hardly to be equaled upon the earth. Rural prospects equally striking, or more so, may be found in abundance; but the embellishments of such a city, at a distance so convenient to the eye, and of such a river, with the navigation, are local advantages peculiar to the spot. Were I to traverse the park daily, perhaps when familiarized to the objects, the effects would not be great. But I believe twenty years or more have passed since I was there, and therefore all appeared to somewhat new to me.

When I was in London, the *cloud of smoke* hanging over the city, to which every house contributes its quota—led me to daydream. I thought it an emblem of the accumulated stock of misery, arising from all the trials and afflictions of individuals in the city. I am persuaded that a sight of these troubles, were our minds capable of receiving it, would give such a sobriety to our minds, that no funny incident, however jocular, would move us to laughter, or even extort a smile. We would no more be able to laugh, than one who could be merry among the lunatics in Bedlam, or in the midst of a group of agonizing sufferers in Bartholomew's Hospital, or on a field of bloody battle! And what is the world at large—but a more extensive and diversified scene of wretchedness, where frenzy and despair, anxiety,

pain, poverty, and death, have their respective wards filled with patients.

I thought it likewise an emblem of that cloud of sin which is continually ascending with a mighty cry into the ears of the Lord Almighty. Sin overspreads the earth; but in London the number and impunity of offenders, joined with the infidelity and profligacy of the times, make it a kind of hot-bed or nursery for wickedness. Sin is studied as a science, and there are professors and inventors of evil things in a variety of branches, who thrive on teaching others to sin with delight. Could we have knowledge of the monstrous enormities and villainies which are committed in a single day in London—it would make us groan and tremble! Such were a part of my meditations, accompanied with some degree of praise to him who snatched me out of that state in which I was a monster in iniquity, and brought me to a knowledge of salvation and peace!

I am your very affectionate and endeared friend, and obliged servant.

Our Imperfect Knowledge of Christ's Love

April 29, 1776.

My dear Miss M,

I thank you for your last letter; and I rejoice in the Lord's goodness to you. To be drawn by love; to be exempted from those distressing terrors and temptations which some are beset with; to be favored with the ordinances and means of grace, and connected with those, and with those only, who are disposed and qualified to assist and encourage you in seeking the Savior—these are special privileges, which all concur in your case. He loves you, he deals gently with you, he provides well for you, and accompanies every outward privilege with his special blessing; and I trust he will lead you on from strength to strength, and show you still greater things than you have yet seen.

Those whom he teaches, are always increasing in knowledge, both of *themselves* and of *him*. The heart is deep, and, like Ezekiel's vision, presents so many chambers of imagery, one within another, that it requires time to get a considerable acquaintance with it, and we shall never know it thoroughly. It is now more than twenty-eight years since the Lord began to open mine to my own view; and from that time to this, almost every day has discovered to me something which until then was unobserved; and the farther I go, the more I seem convinced that I have entered *but a little way*. A person who travels in some parts of Derbyshire may easily be satisfied that the country is cavernous; but how large, how deep, how numerous the caverns may be, which are hidden from us by the surface of the ground, and what is contained in them—are questions which our most discerning

inquirers cannot fully answer. Thus I judge of my heart—that it is very deep and dark, and full of evil; but as to particulars, I know not one of a thousand!

And if our own hearts are beyond our comprehension, how much more incomprehensible is the *heart of Jesus!* If sin abounds in us—grace and love superabound in him! His ways and thoughts are higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth; his love has a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, which passes all knowledge! The riches of his grace are unsearchable riches! Eph. 3:8, Eph. 3:18, Eph. 3:19. All that we have received or can receive from him, or know of him in this life, compared with what he is in himself, or what he has for us—is but as the drop of a bucket—compared with the ocean; or a single ray of light—compared with the sun. The waters of the sanctuary flow to us at first almost ankle deep—so graciously does the Lord condescend to our weakness; but they rise as we advance, and constrain us to cry out, with the Apostle, *O the depth!* We find before us, as Dr. Watts beautifully expresses it,

A sea of love and grace unknown,
Without a bottom or a shore!

O the excellency of the knowledge of Christ! It will be growing upon us through time—yes, I believe through eternity! What an astonishing and what a cheering thought—that this high and lofty One should unite himself to our nature, that so, in a way worthy of his adorable perfections, he might by his Spirit unite us to himself! Could such a thought have arisen in our hearts, without the warrant of his Word (but it is a thought which no created mind was capable of even *conceiving* until he revealed it), it would have been presumption and blasphemy! But now he has made it known, it is the

foundation of our hope, and an inexhaustible spring of life and joy. Well may we say, *Lord what is man, that you should thus visit him!*

Eight Letters to a Pastor

Letter 1

June 29, 1757,

Dear fellow pastor,

I would earnestly press both of us—to follow the Lord fully; to aim at a life of self-denial; to renounce self-will; and to guard against self-wisdom. The less we have to do with the world—the better! Unless we watch and pray—we shall often be ensnared!

Time is precious, and opportunities once gone are gone forever! Even by reading, and what we call studying—we may be comparatively losers. The best way to study—is to be closely waiting upon God in humble, secret, fervent prayer. The treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in His hands—and He gives bountifully, without upbraiding!

Whatever we may undertake with a sincere desire to promote His glory—we may comfortably pursue. Nothing is trivial—which is done for Him.

Pray for me, that I may be enabled to break through the snares of vanity which lie in my way; that I may be crucified with Christ—and live a hidden life of faith in Him who loved me, and gave Himself for me!

Adieu,
John Newton

Letter 2

August 31, 1757.

Dear Sir,

I wish you much of that spirit which was in the Apostle, which made him content to become all things to all men—that he might win some. I am persuaded, that *love* and *humility* are the highest attainments in the school of Christ, and the brightest evidences that he is indeed our Master. If any should seem inclined to treat you with less regard, because you are or have been a Methodist teacher, you will find forbearance, meekness, and long-suffering, the most prevailing means to conquer their prejudices. Our Lord has not only taught us to expect persecution from the world, though this alone is a trial too hard for flesh and blood; but we must look for what is much more grievous to a renewed mind—to be in some respects slighted, censured, and misunderstood, even by our Christian brethren; and that, perhaps, in cases where we are really striving to promote the glory of God and the good of souls, and cannot, without the reproach of our consciences, alter our conduct, however glad we would be to have their approbation.

Therefore we are required, not only to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil—but likewise to bear one another's burdens; which plainly intimates there will be something to be borne with on all hands; and happy indeed is he who is not offended. You may observe what unjust reports and surmises were received, even at Jerusalem, concerning the Apostle Paul; and it seems he was condemned unheard, and that by many thousands too, Act. 21:20-21; but we do

not find he was at all ruffled, or that he sought to retort anything upon them, though doubtless, had he been so disposed, he might have found something to have charged them with in his turn; but he calmly and willingly complied with everything in his power, to soften and convince them.

Let us be followers of this pattern, so far as he was a follower of Christ; for even Christ pleased not himself. How did he bear with the mistakes, weakness, intemperate zeal, and imprudent proposals of his disciples while on earth! And how does he bear with the same things from you and I, and every one of his followers now! And do we, can we think much to bear with each other for his sake? Have we all a full remission of ten thousand talents which we owed him, and were utterly unable to pay; and do we wrangle among ourselves for a few pence? God forbid!

If you should be numbered among the Independents, I advise you not to offend any of them by unnecessary singularities. I wish you not to part with any truth, or with anything really expedient; but if the omitting anything of an indifferent nature will obviate prejudices, and increase a mutual confidence, why should not so easy a sacrifice be made? Above all, my dear friend, let us keep close to the Lord in a way of prayer. He gives wisdom that is profitable to direct. He is the wonderful counselor; there is no teacher like Him. Why do the living seek to the dead? Why do we weary our friends and ourselves, in running up and down, and turning over books for advice? If we shut our eyes upon the world, and worldly things, and raise our thoughts upwards in humility and silence—should we not often hear the secret voice of the Spirit of God whispering to our hearts, and pointing out to us the way of truth and peace? Have we not often gone astray, and hurt either ourselves or our brethren, for lack of attending to this Divine Instruction? Have we not sometimes mocked God, by

pretending to ask direction from him, when we had fixed our determination beforehand? It is a great blessing to know that we are sincere; and next to this, to be convinced of our insincerity, and to pray against it.

Letter 3

November 21, 1757.

Dear Sir,

Can you forgive so negligent a correspondent? I am indeed ashamed; but (if that is any good excuse) I treat you no worse than my other friends. Whenever I write, I am obliged to begin with an apology; for what with business, and the incidental duties of every day—my time is always mortgaged before it comes into my hands, especially as I have so little skill in redeeming and improving it. I long to hear from you, and I long to see you. I have mislaid your letter, and cannot remember the particulars. In general, I remember you were well, and going on comfortably in your work; which was matter of joy to me; and my poor prayers are for you, that the Lord may own and prosper you more and more.

The two great points we are called to pursue in this sinful divided world, are peace and holiness. I hope you are much in the study of them. These are the peculiar characteristics of a disciple of Jesus; they are the richest part of the enjoyments of heaven. And so far as they are received into the heart, they bring down heaven upon earth; and they are more inseparably connected between themselves than some of us are aware of.

The longer I live, the more I see of the vanity and the sinfulness of our *unchristian disputes*. They eat up the very vitals of religion. I grieve to think how often I have lost my time and my temper that

way, in presuming to regulate the vineyards of others, when I have neglected my own; when the beam in my own eye has so contracted my sight, that I could discern nothing but the mote in my neighbor's. I am now desirous to choose a better part. Could I speak the publican's words with a proper feeling, I wish not for the tongue of men or angels to fight about notions or sentiments. I allow that every branch of Gospel truth is precious, that errors are abounding, and that it is our duty to bear an honest testimony to what the Lord has enabled us to find comfort in, and to instruct with meekness such as are willing to be instructed; but I cannot see it my duty, nay, I believe it would be my sin—to attempt to beat my notions into other people's heads. Too often I have attempted it in time past; but I now judge, that both my zeal and my weapons were carnal.

When our dear Lord questioned Peter, after his fall and recovery, he did not say, Are you wise, learned, and eloquent? Are you clear, and sound, and orthodox? But this only, "*Do you love me?*" An answer to this was sufficient then—why not now? Any other answer we may believe would have been insufficient then. If Peter had made the most pompous confession of his faith and sentiments, still the first question would have recurred, "*Do you love me?*" This is a Scripture precedent. Happy the preacher, whoever he be, my heart and my prayers are with him—who can honestly and steadily appropriate Peter's answer! Such a man, I say, I am ready to hear, though he should be as much mistaken in some points as Peter afterwards appears to have been in others.

What a pity it is, that Christians in succeeding ages should think the constraining force of the *love of Christ* too weak, and suppose the end better answered by forms, subscriptions, and questions of their own devising! I cannot acquit even those churches who judge themselves nearest the primitive rule in this respect. Alas! will-

worship and presumption may creep into the best external forms. But the misfortune both in churches and private Christians is, that we are too prone rather to compare ourselves with others—rather than to judge by the Scriptures. And while each can see that they give not into the errors and mistakes of the opposite party, both are ready to conclude that they are right; and thus it happens, that an attachment to a supposed *Gospel-order* will recommend a man sooner and farther to some churches, than an eminency of *Gospel practice*. This, like a worm at the root, has nipped the graces, and hindered the usefulness, of many a valuable man; and those who change sides and opinions are the most liable to it. For the pride of our heart insensibly prompts us to cast about far and near for arguments to justify our own behavior, and makes us too ready to hold the opinions we have taken up to the very extreme, that those among whom we are newly come may not suspect our sincerity.

In a word, let us endeavor to keep close to God, to be much in prayer, and to watch carefully over our hearts. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him, and who wait on him continually; to these he will show his covenant, not notional—but experimentally. A few minutes of the Spirit's teaching will furnish us with more real useful knowledge, than toiling through whole folios of commentators and expositors! They are useful in their places, and are not to be undervalued by those who can perhaps in general do better without them. But it will be our wisdom to deal less with the *streams*, and be more close in applying to the *fountain head*. The Scripture itself, and the Spirit of God, are the best and the only sufficient expositors of Scripture. Whatever men have valuable in their writings, they got it from hence; and the way is as open to us as to any of them. There is nothing required but a teachable humble spirit; and *learning*, as it is commonly called, is not necessary in order to this. I commend you to the grace of God.

Letter 4

January 10, 1760.

Dear Sir,

I have procured Cennick's sermons—they are in my judgment sound and sweet. O that you and I had a double portion of that spirit and unction which is in them! Come, let us not despair; the fountain is as full and as free as ever—precious fountain, ever flowing with blood and water, milk and wine! This is the stream which heals the wounded, refreshes the weary, satisfies the hungry, strengthens the weak, and confirms the strong. It opens the eyes of the blind, softens the heart of stone, teaches the dumb to sing, and enables the lame and paralytic to walk, to leap, to run, to fly, to mount up with eagle's wings! A taste of this stream raises earth to heaven—and brings down heaven upon earth. Nor is it a fountain only; it is a universal blessing, and assumes a variety of shapes to suit itself to our needs. It is a sun, a shield, a garment, a shade, a banner, a refuge. It is bread, the true bread, the very staff of life. It is life itself, immortal, eternal life!

The cross of Jesus Christ, my Lord,
Is food and medicine, shield and sword.

Take that for your motto; wear it in your heart; keep it in your eye; have it often in your mouth, until you can find something better. The cross of Christ is the tree of *life* and the tree of *knowledge* combined. Blessed be God! There is neither prohibition nor flaming sword to keep us back; but it stands like a tree by the wayside, which affords its shade to every passenger without distinction. Watch and pray. We live in a sifting time. Error gains ground every day. May the name and love of our Savior Jesus keep us and all his people!

Letter 5

November 15, 1760.

Dear Sir,

If your *visit* should be delayed, let me have a *letter*. I want either good news or good advice; to hear that your soul prospers, or to receive something that may quicken my own soul. The Apostle says, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Alas! we know how to say something about it—but how faint and feeble are our real perceptions of it! *Our love to him is the proof and measure—of what we know of his love to us.* Surely, then, we are mere children in this kind of knowledge, and every other kind is vain. What would we think of a man who would neglect his business, family, and all the comforts of life, that he might study the Chinese language; though he knows beforehand he should never be able to attain it, nor ever find occasion or opportunity to use it? The pursuit of every branch of knowledge that is not closely connected with the *one thing needful*, is no less ridiculous.

You know something of our friend Mrs. B. She has been more than a month confined to her bed, and I believe her next remove will be to her coffin! The Lord has done great things for her. Though she has been a serious exemplary person all her life, when the prospect of death presented, she began to cry out earnestly, "What shall I do to be saved?" But her solicitude is at an end. She has seen the salvation of God, and now for the most part rejoices in something more than hope. This you will account good news, I am sure. Let it be your encouragement and mine. The Lord's arm is not shortened, nor is his presence removed. He is near us still, though we perceive him not. May he guide you with his eye in all your public and private

concerns, and may he in particular bless our communications to our mutual advantage!

Letter 6

July 29, 1761.

Dear Sir,

Are the quarrels made up? Tell those who know what communion with Jesus is worth, that they will never be able to maintain it, if they give way to the workings of pride, jealousy, and anger. This will provoke the Lord to leave them dry; to command the clouds of his grace that they rain no showers of blessing upon them. These things are sure signs of a low frame, and a sure way to keep it so. Could they be prevailed upon, from a sense of the pardoning love of God to their own souls, to forgive each other as the Lord forgives us—freely, fully, without condition and without reserve, they would find this like breaking down a stone wall, which has hitherto shut up their prayers from the Lord's ears, and shut out his blessing from filling their hearts. Tell them, I hope to hear that all animosities, little and big, are buried by mutual consent in the Redeemer's grave.

Alas! the people of God have enemies enough. Why then will they weaken their own hands? Why will they help their enemies to pull down the Lord's work? Why will they grieve those who wish them well, cause the weak to stumble, the wicked to rejoice, and bring a reproach upon their holy profession? Indeed this is no light matter; I wish it may not lead them to something worse; I wish they may be wise in time, lest Satan gain further advantage over them, and draw them to something that shall make them (as David did) roar under the pains of broken bones. But I must break off.

May God give you wisdom, faithfulness, and patience. Take care that you do not catch an angry spirit yourself, while you aim to suppress it in others; this will spoil all, and you will exhort, advise, and weep in vain. May you rather be an *example* and *pattern* to the flock. And in this view, be not surprised if you yourself meet some harsh usage; rather rejoice, that you will thereby have an opportunity to exemplify your own rules, and to convince your people, that what you recommend to them—you do not speak by rote—but from the experience of your heart.

One end why our Lord was tempted was for the encouragement of his poor followers, that they might know him to be a High Priest suited to them, having had a fellow-feeling in their distresses. For the like reason, he appoints his ministers to be sorely exercised both from without and within, that they may sympathize with their flock, and know in their own hearts the deceitfulness of sin, the infirmities of the flesh, and the way in which the Lord supports and bears with all that trust in him. Therefore be not discouraged; usefulness and trials, comforts and crosses, strength and exercise—all go together. But remember Him has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life!" When you get to heaven, you will not complain of the *difficult way* by which the Lord brought you. Farewell. Pray for us.

Letter 7

Dec. 14, 1761.

Dear Sir,

I pray the Lord to accompany you; but cannot help fearing you go on too fast. If you have not (as I am sure you ought not) made an absolute promise—but only conditional one—you need not be so

solicitous. Depend upon it, when the Lord is pleased to remove you, he will send one to supply your place. I am grieved that your mind is so set upon a step, which I fear will occasion many inconveniences to a people who have deserved your best regard. Others may speak you fairer—but none wishes you better than myself. Therefore I hope you allow me to speak my mind plainly, and believe that it is no pleasure to me to oppose your inclinations. As to your saying they will take no denial, it has no weight with me. Had they asked what you were exceedingly averse to, you would soon have expressed yourself so as to convince them it was to no purpose to urge you; but they saw something in your manner or language that encouraged them; they saw the proposal was agreeable to you, that you were not at all unwilling to exchange your old friends for new ones; and this is the reason they would take no denial. If you should live to see those who are most forward in pressing you, become the first to discourage you, you will think seriously of my words.

If I thought my advice would prevail, it would be this. Call the people together, and desire them (if possible) to forget you ever intended to depart from them; and promise not to think of a removal, until the Lord shall make your way so clear, that even they shall have nothing reasonable to object against it. You may keep your word with your other friends too; for when a proper person shall offer, as likely to please and satisfy the people as yourself, I will give my hearty consent to your removal.

Consider what it is you would have in your office—but maintenance, acceptance, and success. Have you not those where you are? Are you sure of having them where you are going? Are you sure the Spirit of God (without which you will do nothing) will be with you there, as he has been with you hitherto? Perhaps if you act in your own spirit—you may find as great a change as Samson. I am ready to weep when

I think what difficulties were surmounted to accomplish your ordination; and now, when the people thought themselves fixed—that you should so soon disappoint them!

Letter 8

Feb. 15, 1762.

Dear Sir,

I have been often thinking of you since your removal, and was glad to receive your letter today. I hope you will still go on to find more and more encouragement to believe, that the Lord has disposed and led you to the step you have taken. For though I wrote with the greatest plainness and earnestness, and would, if in my power, have prevented it while under deliberation—yet, now it is done, and past recall—I would rather help than dishearten you. Indeed, I cannot say that my view of the affair is yet altered.

The best way not to be cast down hereafter—is not to be too *expectant* at first. You know there is something pleasing in *novelty*; as yet you are new to them—and they to you. I pray God that you may find as cordial a regard from them as at present, when you have been with them as many years as in the place you came from. And if you have grace to be watchful and prayerful, all will be well; for we serve a gracious Master, who knows how to over-rule even our mistakes to his glory and our own advantage.

Yet I observe that when we do wrong, sooner or later we smart for our indiscretion; perhaps many years afterwards. After we have seen and confessed our fault, and received repeated proofs of pardoning love, as to the guilt—yet chastisement, to remind us more sensibly of our having done amiss, will generally find us out. So it was with *David*, in the matter of *Uriah*. The Lord put away his sin, healed his

broken bones, and restored unto him the light of his countenance—yet many troubles, in consequence of this affair, followed one upon another, until at length (many years afterwards) he was driven from Jerusalem by his own son! So it was with *Jacob*. He dealt deceitfully with his brother Esau. Notwithstanding this, the Lord appeared to him and blessed him, gave him comfortable promises, and revealed himself to him from time to time—yet, after an interval of twenty years, his fault was brought afresh to his remembrance, and his heart trembled within him when he heard his brother was coming with armed men to meet him!

And thus I have found it in my own experience. Things which I had forgotten a long while have been brought to my mind by providential dispensations which I little expected; but the first rise of which I have been able to trace far back, and forced to confess, that the Lord is indeed He who judges the heart and tries the thoughts. I hint this for your caution. You know best upon what grounds you have proceeded; but if (though I do not affirm it, I hope otherwise), I say, if you have acted too much in your own spirit, been too hasty and precipitate; if you have not been sufficiently tender of your people, nor thoughtful of the consequences which your departure will probably involve them in; if you were impatient under the Lord's hand, and, instead of waiting his time and way of removing the trials and difficulties you found—you have ventured upon an attempt to free and mend yourself. I say, if any of these things have mixed with your determinations, something will fall out to show you your fault. Either you will not find the success you hope for—or friends will grow cold—or enemies and difficulties you dream not of, will present themselves—or your own mind will alter, so as what seems now most pleasing will afford you little pleasure. Yet, though I write thus, I do not mean (as I said before) to discourage you—but that you may be forewarned, humble, and watchful. If you should at any time have a

different view of things, you may take comfort from the instances I have mentioned.

The trials of David and Jacob were sharp; but they were short, and they proved to their advantage, put them upon acts of humiliation and prayer, and ended in a double blessing. *Nothing can harm us, which quickens our earnestness and frequency in applying to a Throne of Grace!* Only trust the Lord and keep close to him—and all that befalls you shall be for good. *Temptations* end in victory; *troubles* prove an increase of consolation; yes, our very *falls* and *failings* tend to increase our spiritual wisdom; and give us a greater knowledge of Satan's devices—and make us more habitually upon our guard against them. Happy case of the believer in Jesus! When bitten by the fiery serpent he needs not go far for a remedy; he has only to look to a bleeding Savior, and be healed.

I think one great advantage that attends a removal into a new place is, that it gives an easy opportunity of forming a new plan, and breaking off any poor habits which we have found inconvenient, and yet perhaps could not so readily lay aside, where our customs and acquaintance had been long formed. I earnestly recommend to you to reflect, if you cannot recollect some things which you have hitherto omitted, which may properly be now taken up; some things formerly allowed, which may now with ease and convenience be laid aside. I only give the hint in general; for I have nothing in particular to charge you with.

I recommend to you to be very choice of your time, especially the beginning of the day. Let your morning hours be devoted to prayer, reading, and study; and do not allow the importunity of friends to rob you of the hours before noon, without a just necessity. And if you accustom yourself to rise *early* in the morning, you will find a great

advantage. Be careful to avoid losing your thoughts, whether in books or otherwise, upon any subjects which are not of a direct subservience to your great design, until towards dinner time. The afternoon is not so favorable to study. This is a proper time for paying and receiving visits, conversing among your friends, or unbending with a book of instructive entertainment, such as history, etc., which may increase your general knowledge, without a great confinement of your attention; but let the morning hours be sacred.

I think you would likewise find advantage in using your *pen* more. Write short notes upon the Scriptures you read, or transcribe the labors of others; make extracts from your favorite authors, especially those who, besides a fund of spiritual and evangelical matter, have a happy talent of expressing their thoughts in a clear and lively, or moving manner. You would find a continued exercise in this way would be greatly useful to form your own style, and help your delivery and memory; you would become insensibly *master of their thoughts*, and find it more easy to express yourself justly and clearly.

What we only read we easily lose—but what we commit to paper is not so soon forgotten. Especially remember (what you well know—but we cannot too often remind each other), that *frequent secret prayer is the life of all we do*. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given—but all our diligence will fail—if we are remiss in this particular!

Keep close to the work you have undertaken; and endeavor to avoid anything that looks like ostentation, or a desire to be taken notice of. You see I advise you with the freedom of a friend who loves you, and longs to see your work and your soul prosper.

You will, I doubt not, endeavor to promote the practice of frequent prayer in the houses that receive you. I look upon prayer meetings as

the most profitable exercises (excepting the public preaching) in which Christians can engage. They have a direct tendency to kill a worldly trifling spirit, to draw down a Divine blessing upon all our concerns, resolve differences, and enkindle (at least to maintain) the flame of Divine love among brethren. But I need not tell you the advantages; you know them. I only would exhort you; and the rather as I find in my own case, the principal cause of my leanness and unfruitfulness is owing to an unaccountable backwardness to pray. I can write, or read, or converse, or hear, with a ready will—but prayer is more *spiritual* and inward than any of these; and the more spiritual any duty is—the more my carnal heart is apt to draw aside from it. May the Lord pour forth his precious spirit of prayer and supplication in both our hearts!

I am not well pleased with the account you give of so many dry bones. It increases my wonder, that you could so readily exchange so much plump flesh and blood as you had about you—for a parcel of skeletons. I wish they may not *haunt* you, and disturb your peace! I wish these same dry bones do not prove *thorns* in your sides and in your eyes. You say, now you have to pray, and prophesy, and wait for the four winds to come and put life into these bones. God grant that your prayers may be answered. But if I knew a man who possessed a field in a tolerable soil, which had afforded him some increase every year; and if this man, after having bestowed seven years' labor in cultivating, weeding, fertilizing, fencing, etc.—just when he has brought his ground (in his neighbor's judgment) into good order, and might reasonably hope for larger crops than he had ever yet seen, should suddenly forego all his advantages, leave his good seed for the birds to eat, pull up the young fences which cost him so much pains to plant—and all this for the sake of making a new experiment upon the top of a mountain; though I might heartily wish him great success, I could not honestly give him great encouragement. You

have parted with that for a trifle, which in my eye seems an inestimable jewel; I mean the hearts and affections of an enlightened people! This appears to me one of the greatest honors and greatest pleasures a faithful minister can possess, and which many faithful and eminent ministers have never been able to obtain. This gave you a vast advantage. Your gift was more acceptable there than that of any other person, and more than you will probably find elsewhere. For I cannot make a comparison between the hasty approbation of a few, whose eyes are but beginning to open, and their affections and passions warm, so that they must, if possible, have the man that first catches their attention; I say, I cannot think this worthy to be compared to the regard of a people who understood the Gospel, were able to judge of men and doctrines, and had trial of you for so many years.

It is indeed much to your honor (it proves that you were faithful, diligent, and exemplary) that the people proved so attached to you—but that you should tear yourself from them, when they so dearly loved you, and so much needed you—this has made all your friends in these parts to wonder, and your enemies to rejoice; and I, alas! know not what to answer in your behalf to either. Say not, "*I hate this Micaiah, for he prophesies not good of me—but evil;*" but allow me the privilege of a friend. My heart is full when I think of what has happened, and what will probably be the consequence. In few words, I am strongly persuaded you have taken an unadvised step, and would therefore prepare you for the inconvenience and uneasiness you may probably meet with. And if I am (as I desire I may prove) mistaken, my advice will do no harm; you will need something to balance the caresses and success you meet with.

We would be very glad to see you, and hope you will take your measures, when you do come, to lengthen your usual stay, in

proportion to the difference of the distance. Pray for us.

Six Letters to a Pastor

Letter 1

August 1, 1774

My dear sir,

We were very glad to hear so favorable an account of your health—but your letter to Mr. ____ (we were with him when it came to hand) rather balked the hope we had entertained, that you would be well in a few days. Therefore we shall be glad to hear from you again, for we sincerely feel ourselves much interested in all that concerns you. However, I know that you are in safe and merciful hands, and that the Lord loves you better than we can do. Though we may mistake in estimating particulars, we are sure that the sum-total of all dispensations will be good. *Health* is good while the Lord preserves it—and *sickness* is still better when he appoints it. He is good when he grants our wishes and multiplies our comforts—and he is good when he sends us trials and crosses. We are short-sighted and cannot see how many and what important consequences depend upon every turn in life; but the whole *chain of events* are open to his view.

When we arrive in the land of glory, we shall have an affecting retrospect of the way by which the Lord our God led us through this wilderness. We shall then see that whenever we were in heaviness, there was a need-be for it. We shall then, I doubt not, remember, among our choicest blessings, those things which, while we were here, seemed the hardest to account for, and the hardest to bear. Perhaps we were sinking into a lukewarm *formality*, or spiritual *pride* was springing up, or Satan was spreading some dangerous

snare for our feet. How seasonable and important at such a time, is the *mercy* which, under the disguise of an *affliction*, gives an alarm to the soul, quickens us to prayer, makes us feel our own emptiness, and preserves us from the enemy's net!

These reflections are applicable to all the Lord's people—but emphatically so to his *ministers*. We stand in the fore-front of the battle. The nature of our employment exposes us to peculiar dangers; more eyes are upon us; our deviations are more observed, and have worse effects, both with respect to the church and the world, than if we were in private life. By our own sufferings we learn likewise (the Lord sanctifying them to that end) to sympathize with the afflicted, and to comfort them from the experiences we have had of the Lord's goodness and faithfulness to ourselves. I trust you will be thankful for your late exercises, and that we, in due time, shall have to join you in thanking the Lord for restoring you to health and strength, and that you will come forth, under the fresh anointing of his Holy Spirit, to publish the glad tidings of salvation, and win many souls to the knowledge of Jesus.

I mentioned having been at Mr. ____ 's. We went on Tuesday morning, and did not return until Saturday evening. Had not the Sunday service called me home, I believe we would have stayed longer. It was a happy opportunity; I believe mutually so. We talked of you, and would have been glad to have had you with us. I have seldom been in a family where I thought myself more at home, or where I have been more satisfied that the blessing of the Lord dwelt. I returned in some measure thankful and refreshed. I have great reason to be thankful that my spirit is not confined within the *paper walls of a denomination*; for I have had frequent proof that the Spirit of the Lord will not be restrained within such narrow bounds. May my soul be ever free to unite with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ

in sincerity, without regarding those lesser differences which will soon be done away.

Your prayers and kind wishes for me and mine, I heartily thank you for, and hope we shall repay you (as we are enabled) in kind. Many here have, indeed, reason to speak well of the Lord. He has been very gracious to us. But, alas! most of us may complain of *ourselves*. But, unworthy as we are, he bears with us; he multiplies pardons, and keeps us upon the whole in a persuasion that his loving kindness is better than life. The workings of a corrupt nature, and the subtlety of our spiritual enemies, cause us much exercise; but we find one with us who is greater than our hearts, and greater than he who is in the world. When I look at some of my people, I am filled both with joy and shame; joy to see that the Lord has not allowed my labor among them to be in vain; shame to think that I have preached so much more effectually to them—than to my own heart. It is my mercy that I am not under the law—but under grace. Were it not for this thought, I would sink. But it is given me to know that Jesus is all—to those who are nothing. The promise whereon I trust, and the power of trusting in it, are both from him, and therefore I am encouraged to plead, "Remember your Word unto your servant, wherein you have caused me to hope." A sure promise, a complete atonement, a perfect righteousness, an Almighty Savior, who is able to save to the uttermost, and has said, "I will never cast out." These are the weapons with which I (alas, how feebly!) oppose the discouragements which arise from self and unbelief.

I am sincerely, dear sir, your affectionate and obliged.

Letter 2

October 6, 1774

My dear friend,

I have two letters to thank you for; and was thinking of answering the first, when the second came. The contents gave me pleasure. My poor prayers have been, and shall be, for you; and, that I might be with you in spirit as much as possible, I thought I would write to you on your wedding-day. May the good Lord say Amen to your engagements and desires, and give you, in each other, a help-meet, a counselor, a comforter; may he fill your hearts with his peace, give you a daily increase of happiness in your connection, that you may be,

Enamored more, as more remembrance swells
With many a proof of recollected love!

And while the Lord blesses your relation outwardly, in the midst of his best gifts, and the most endearing satisfaction that creatures can afford—may you both have grace to remember that you are not your own, that this is not your rest; that the time is short, and that the light of God's countenance is still, comparatively, "The one thing needful."

I have been interrupted since I began my letter, and I must leave it again soon to go to my children, for it is almost eleven. I may now salute you as one, and, from the time of my standing in wedded life, I shall take the liberty of assuming the professor's chair, and offering you a little lecture upon the subject. May the Lord prompt my heart and guide my pen.

With respect to this world, **marriage** is undoubtedly the most important concern in which we can engage. It has an influence upon every action and every hour of the future life. The success depends not upon *physical appearances*, for they are changeable; nor upon our present *affections* or *purposes*, for we are frail, inconstant

creatures, and prone to be soon weary of the possession of our warmest wishes; but entirely upon the blessing of the Lord, without which no union can exist. We see too many instances of people who come together with all seeming advantages, and yet from unforeseen causes, the *affection* which promised to be permanent, gradually subsides into indifference, and perhaps terminates in disgust. We cannot but wonder at these failures, when we consider how seldom the Lord is duly acknowledged either in the choice, the pursuit, or the attainment of the object. It is your mercy that he taught you both to seek his direction, and to depend upon his providence, in bringing this weighty affair to an outcome; and therefore you may cheerfully expect repeated proofs that he did not bid you to seek his face in vain.

Since I began this paragraph I have been with my children, and the passage which came in course for my exposition to them, was Genesis 24. It was quite apropos to the case upon my mind. The historical part of the Old Testament, so far as it concerns nations, is undoubtedly put into our hands as a specimen of the Lord's government over all the nations of the earth—and the history of his care and providence over the personal and family concerns of his children from age to age. His interposition is not always so obvious to sense now, as it often was then; but it is as real and necessary in itself, and not less evident to faith when in exercise. He provided and prepared you for each other; he opened the way; he has brought you together, and now he will be with you to bless your union, to guide you with his eye, to be your Sun and your Shield. And yet there are so many *evils* in our hearts to be checked, and the comparative *vanity* and *emptiness* of all below the skies is a lesson so very needful to be learned, and so unattainable in any other way than by experience—that we must expect at times to find *bitters* mingled with our *sweets*,

and some of our sharpest *pains* flowing from the same source with our most valued *pleasures*.

I am now far advanced in the twenty-fifth year of marriage; and, though I set out blindfold, and was so far infatuated by an idolatrous passion, that for a while I looked no higher for happiness than to a worm like myself; yet the Lord, whose dealings with me have always been singular, did not deal with me as I deserved. He sent, indeed, again and again, a *worm* to the root of my gourd, and many an anxious trembling hour have I suffered; but he pitied my weakness, gradually opened my eyes, and, while he in some measure weakened and mortified the idolatrous part of affection, he smiled upon that part of it which was lawful and subordinate, and caused it to flourish and strengthen from year to year.

When I look back upon my past life, and look around in the world, I mean especially as a husband, I cannot but say, my lot in life has been most happy. Few, I think, can have been more favored; and, to the best of my recollection, I never wished, for a single minute, it were possible to exchange situation with any person upon earth. And yet what is it I have known? When I recollect my wedding-day, the circumstances are so present with me, that it seems as if it were but yesterday, and all the interval but a dream. If I take that interval to pieces, I see, indeed, that goodness and mercy have followed us all our days; I see, as I have said, that we have had a larger share of such happiness as this world can afford—but at the same time mingled with so many trials, that, though the Lord mercifully parceled them out, and has brought me safely through them one after another—taken together, they have made very large abatements in the article of pleasure.

My dear friends, you will now acquire a new set of feelings. How sickness, or pain, or trouble affects you in your own persons, you know; but how you will be affected by them in the person of a husband or a wife, you have yet to learn. I wish you may know as little of it as is consistent with your best good; but, if the Lord loves you, and you love each other, now and then something of this sort will be needful. Yet be not afraid; he delights in the prosperity of his children, and will not causelessly afflict.

One trial of mine I wish you may be wholly freed from, the experience of a deceitful and desperately wicked heart, that you may never have to confess, as I do to you, that my perverseness and ingratitude have revealed themselves most frequently, and most flagrantly—by occasion of that very instance of his goodness, which in a temporal view I account the chief blessing of my life. This has been an abatement indeed. How often have I wondered that he has not punished me in kind, and taken away the desire of my eyes with a stroke.

One trial we have yet to come—the alternative of leaving or being left. The flesh shrinks at the thought of either; and since we know not how soon, or in what way, a separation may take place, there can be no abiding peace until we are enabled to commit ourselves, and all that we hold most dear—to the care and the disposal of our Lord. I have been long aiming at this; and it seems so right, so eligible in theory, that sometimes I think I have succeeded, that I have made an absolute surrender, and am well satisfied that he should do whatever he pleases—then what he pleases, must be the best—but, alas! the next alarm convinces me how weak I am, and how afraid and unwilling to trust him. Yet, surely, it is the desire of my soul to say, without reserve or exception, Not my will—but yours be done. So far as we can attain to this, we are happy.

I have left no room to answer your letters. I could have wished for a more favorable account of your health—but hope the Lord will gradually confirm it. He can, for he is *power*; He will, for he is *love*—if it be upon the whole best for you. I am glad to hear of Mr. _____, and wish him much success, and commend my love to him. Mr. _____, has lost his wife; I suppose he had her not much above a year. So frail are all things here below!

I am sincerely yours.

Letter 3

May 31, 1775

My dear sir,

Though we agreed to waive apologies, it would befit me to make a very humble one if I should long delay writing, now you have favored me with a second letter. I thank you for both; it gives us real pleasure to hear of your and your wife's welfare.

I rejoice that the Lord keeps your spirit alive in his work, and lets you see that your labor is not in vain. Oh, the honor, the blessedness, of being an instrument in his hands of feeding his gathered sheep and lambs, and bringing wanderers into his fold! That is a striking and beautiful thought of the apostle, "as poor—yet making many rich." When I feel my own poverty, my heart wandering, my head confused, graces languid, gifts apparently dormant; when I thus stand up with half a loaf, or less, before a multitude—and see the bread multiply in the breaking, and that, however it may be at the time with myself, as to my own feelings, the hungry, the thirsty, the mourners in Zion, are not wholly disappointed; when I find that some, in the depth of their outward afflictions, can rejoice in me, as the messenger by whom the Lord is pleased to send them a word in season, balm for their

wounds, and cordials for their cases; then indeed I magnify my office.

Let who will, take the lead in the cabinets of princes; let those whom the Lord permits shine in the eyes of men, as statesmen, generals, or favorites; He has given me the desire of my heart, and I am more disposed to pity than to envy those whom the world admires. "This is what the Lord says: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches—but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord." Jeremiah 9:23-24

On the day when the Lord admitted me into the ministry, and I received ordination, I thought he had then ennobled me, and raised me to greater honor and preferment than any earthly king could have bestowed; and, blessed be his name, I think so still, and had rather be the pastor of this church, than in any situation the world can afford, if detached from the privilege of preaching the gospel. Yet I find the ministry a bitter sweet; the pleasure is tempered with many things that make a near and painful impression upon the spirit; but, upon the whole, it is given unto me (and I trust to you likewise) to rejoice in it.

The civility of your genteel neighbors is an agreeable circumstance, so far as it can be preserved without inconvenience. I am quite of your mind, that our high calling, as Christians, does not require us to be cynical, and that many professors, and perhaps preachers, bring needless trouble upon themselves, for lack of a gentle, loving spirit. The gospel teaches us to show benevolence and a humble posture to all. Yet there is an extreme upon the other hand, which is, upon the

whole, even more dangerous. They are singularly favored, whom the Lord is pleased to guide and to keep in the *golden balance*. What we call a polite and cultivated behavior, is certainly no real bar to that faithfulness we owe to God or man; and, if maintained under a strict Scriptural restraint, may greatly soften prejudices, and conciliate the good-will even of unawakened hearers in a considerable degree. But, indeed, those who have it, have need of a double guard of watchfulness and prayer, for unless the eye is kept very single, and the heart dependent upon the Lord—we are more liable to be drawn into a compliance with the ways of the *polite world*, than likely to prevail on them to follow us, so far as we follow Christ.

I could name instances where it has appeared to me, that the probable good effects of a very faithful testimony in the pulpit, have (humanly speaking) been wholly defeated by too successful endeavors to be *agreeable* when outside of it. The world will often permit a minister to think, and perhaps to preach, as he pleases—provided he will come as near them as possible in a sociable conformity. I hope you will not be angry with me—but rather impute it to my cordial affection, if I feel some fears, lest the kindness of your neighbors should insensibly in some degree at least dampen your zeal and abate your influence. I trust my fears are groundless, and my admonitions quite unnecessary.

I see you possessed of all advantages, recommended by family, situation, education, and address, and encompassed, it seems, with people who are disposed to receive you favorably upon these accounts. I see you stand in a post of honor—and therefore I know Satan eyes you, and watches subtly for an advantage against you. Were he to raise a storm of *persecution* against you, and attack you openly, I would be in little pain for the event. For I believe the Lord has given you such a sense of the worth of the gospel, that you would

not be threatened easily into a timid silence; and perhaps that natural warmth of temper which you speak of, might be of some advantage were the assault made on this side. This, perhaps, Satan knows; he knows how to suit his temptations, to our personal tempers and circumstances. And if, like Achilles, you have a vulnerable heel—the serpent will be sure to strike there!

I apprehend you are more in danger of suffering loss by the *smiles*, than by the *frowns* of men. Since I have seen some eminent ministers, whom I need not name to you, so sadly hurt, both in their experience and in their usefulness, (and many more in private life,) by *worldly connections*, I am ready perhaps to take the alarm, and to sound the alarm too soon. But I know that the heart is deceitful in all things, and I know that often the first steps by which we deviate from the path of duty, diverge so gently and imperceptibly from the right line—that we may have actually lost our way before we are sensible we have missed the road! After all, I hope this, my grave remonstrance, has sprung entirely from my own misapprehension of a few lines in your first letter, and will stand for nothing but to show that I love you, and that, professing myself a friend, I dare be faithful. if you think me faulty, of course you will not write until you have forgiven me, and therefore I hope you will forgive me soon, or my punishment will be heavy enough.

I hope often to think of your wife. May the Lord preserve her safely to and through the hour of trial, and make her a joyful mother. May you both rejoice hereafter in being parents to a vessel of mercy. Please to give our respects to her. You may assure her, I can hardly think of any person whose idea affects me with more esteem and regard than her's. We would have been glad to have seen you both here, had your journey taken place, and shall be so at any time. As to

myself, I have no more expectation of seeing the Yorkshire hills—than the Alps! But I know that *my inclination* is not lacking.

The Lord has *transplanted* some more of *my* flowers, or rather *his* own—to flourish in a better climate; but he has likewise given us a few *slips* and *seedlings* to supply their place. The Word does not flourish here as I ought to wish it; but, through mercy, it is not wholly without effect. We are in good harmony; ordinances are prized, and a gospel lifestyle is maintained, by those who profess.

You ask *how I am*—but I know not what answer to give. My experience is made up of enigmas—but the sum and solution of all is, "That I am a vile creature—but I have a good Lord. He has chosen me; and through his rich grace—I have chosen Him. There is a union between Him and my soul, which shall never be broken, because he has undertaken for both parts—that He never will forsake me, and that I never shall forsake Him. Oh, I like those royal, sovereign words, "I *will*," and "you *shall*." How sweetly are they suited to the sense and long experience he has given me of my own weakness, and the power and subtlety of Satan. If my spiritual conflicts terminate in victory, it must be owing to His own arm, and for His own name's sake. For I in myself have neither strength nor plea. If I were not so poor, so sick, so foolish—the power, skill, riches, wisdom, and mercy of my Physician, Shepherd, and Savior—would not be so signally illustrated in my own case. Upon this account, instead of complaining, we may glory in our infirmities. Oh, it is pleasant to be deeply indebted to Him, to find Him, and own Him, all in all—

Our Husband, Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
Our Guide, and Guard, our Way, and End!

"Christ is all!" Colossians 3:11

"I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts—that *they shall not depart from Me!*" Jeremiah 32:40

I beg a frequent interest in your prayers, and remain, dear sir, your affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 4

July 26, 1775

My dear sir,

I have been a little impatient until I could find a leisure hour to thank you for your very obliging answer to my last letter. I ventured a good deal upon my opinion of you, or I would not have written so freely; and I am not disappointed. You may be assured that I never heard a word concerning you but what was good; and I plead the manner of my writing as a proof that I saw nothing in you but what tended to endear you to me. Had I observed anything with my own eyes which I had disapproved, it is probable I would have been deterred by it from expressing that fidelity which you are so kind as to take in good part.

My suspicions did not arise from any fear of you, personally considered, so much as from the feelings of my own heart, and the sense I have of the weakness of human nature, and the subtlety of Satan in general. Nay, upon second thoughts, I believe that there was nothing in your letter from whence such suspicions could be fully and warrantably deduced. However, whether I would or not, my thoughts took such a turn, I seemed to be almost satisfied at first that they were groundless; yet I was determined to communicate them to you, for such reasons as these—

First, I was persuaded that, at any rate, it would do no harm to drop a word by way of putting you upon your guard, since I knew that you, as well as myself, were still within gun-shot of the enemy.

Secondly, I really expected that you would think favorably of my intention, and love me the better for it.

And of course I believed, thirdly, that the proof you would give me, under your own hand, of your humility and uprightness of spirit, in receiving my hint as I meant it, would heighten my regard for you, and thus our friendship would be mutually strengthened.

All has happened according to my wishes; and I ought to ask your pardon, when I confess that, in the interval between my letter and yours, I sometimes felt my heart go a little pit-a-pat, for fear that you would be displeased. I wronged you by entertaining the most distant apprehension of this kind. How sorry would I have been to have grieved you, or to have appeared to you in the disagreeable light of a busy-body, or a dictator! However, if I had not pretty well known my man, I ran a considerable risk. Indeed, *my pen is apt to express the sentiments of my heart with little restraint, when I write to those whom I cordially love and esteem*; but surely no one has less right than myself to set up for a censor. I have enough to watch over and bemoan at home; and any cautions or advises which I occasionally offer to my friends, would, as coming from me, be highly impertinent and presuming, did not the Word of God seem to bear me out in supposing that the *hearts of others* are in some degree like my own.

Much of what you say of yourself, I think I can adopt likewise. I hope I am pretty generally considered among my acquaintances as a *lover of peace*, and therefore I am amicably treated and borne with on all sides. But I am a sort of middle man, and consequently no great stress is laid upon me where the strengthening of a party, or the

fighting for a sentiment, is the point in view. I am an avowed Calvinist. The points which are usually comprised in that term, seem to me so consonant to Scripture, reason, (when enlightened,) and experience—that I have not the shadow of a doubt about them. But I cannot *dispute*—and I dare not *speculate*. What is by some called high Calvinism, I dread. I feel much more union of spirit with some Arminians, than I could with some Calvinists. If I thought a certain person feared sin, loved the Word of God, and was seeking after Jesus, I would not walk the length of my study to proselyte him to the Calvinistic doctrines. Not because I think them mere opinions, or of little importance to a believer—I think the contrary; but because I believe these doctrines will do no one any good until he is taught them of God. I believe a too *hasty assent to Calvinistic principles*, before a person is duly acquainted with the plague of his own heart, is one principal cause of that lightness of profession which so lamentably abounds in this day, a chief reason why many professors are rash, heady, high-minded, contentious about words, and sadly remiss as to the divine means of grace. For this reason, I suppose, though I never preach a sermon in which the tincture of Calvinism may not be easily discerned by a judicious hearer—yet I very seldom insist expressly upon those *five points*, unless they fairly and necessarily be in my way. I believe most people who are truly alive to God, sooner or later meet with some pinches in their experience which constrain them to flee to those *doctrines of grace*, for relief, which perhaps they had formerly dreaded, if not abhorred, because they knew not how to get over some harsh consequences they thought necessarily resulting from them, or because they were stumbled by the miscarriages of those who professed them. In this way I was made a Calvinist myself; and I am content to let the Lord take his own way, and his own time, with others.

I remember to have seen a letter from you to Mr. ____ —but I can recollect nothing in particular of the subject—but I suppose, if I had disliked it, or received any unfavorable impressions from it, some traces of it would have still remained in my memory. From what I have written above, and from the beginning of Omicron's ninth letter, (which was written in answer to one from Mr. ____ ,) I hope you will believe that I should be much more likely to blame his forwardness in giving the challenge, than your prudence in declining. I trust he means well; but, as you say, he is young, and I know not but the kind reception he met with in Yorkshire might send him home with a *greater idea of his own importance* than he carried with him from hence. I suppose it was just about that time, when his spirit was a little raised, that he wrote to you. Young men often make mistakes of this kind. The Lord's blessing upon years, experience, and inward exercises, cures them of it by degrees, or at least in a degree; for, *alas, the root of SELF lies deep, and is not easily eradicated.* "People will be lovers of self" 2 Timothy 3:2. "If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." Mark 8:34

We were very glad to hear that your wife is likely to do well after her delivery. I hope, that if the Lord spares the child to you—he will be numbered among the children of his grace. If God calls him home by a short life, he will escape a number of storms and troubles incident to human life. I know not how to regret the *death of infants*, especially under the dark apprehensions I have of the times. How do they appeal to you? The prevalence of sin, and the contempt of the gospel, in this long favored land, make me apprehensive that the present commotions are but the beginning of sorrows. Since we heard of the commencement of hostilities in America, we have had extraordinary prayer-meetings. It is held on Tuesday morning, weekly, at five o'clock, and is well attended. We are not politicians

here; but we wish to be found among those described, Ezekiel. 9:4. We pray for the restoration of peace, and a blessing upon our public counsels.

I am your affectionate and obliged.

Letter 5

September 3, 1776

My dear sir,

The flowers which you sent have their value, they are very beautiful, and therefore pleasing; but they are very *transitory*, and therefore instructive. All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower; the flower is more conspicuous and beautiful than the grass—but likewise more precarious and liable to fade. Ministers, some of them at least, have a beauty beyond the grass, the bulk of their hearers. They are adorned with gifts and advantages of knowledge and expression which distinguish them for a time—but the flower fades.

How precarious are those distinctions for which some admire them, and for which they are in danger sometimes of admiring themselves! A fever, or a small change in the physical system, may deprive them of their abilities; and, while they remain, a thousand things may happen to prevent their exercise. Happy are those wise and faithful stewards, who know and approve their talents while afforded, who work while it is *day*—aware how soon, how suddenly, a *night* may overtake them. They may be hastily removed, cut down by the *scythe of death*; or, as the stalk remains after the flower is faded, they may outlive their usefulness.

However, the true servants of the Lord have something that will not decay. *Grace* is of an abiding nature, and will remain when the gifts

of *knowledge* and *elocution* are withered. We know not what changes we may live to see; but God's love and promises, which are the pleasing subjects of our ministry, are unchangeable.

It gives me much pleasure that we are remembered by you and your friends for then, I hope, you pray for us. We are likewise mindful of you. Though absent in body, I am often present with you in spirit.

The ignorance of the people is indeed lamentable; we have affecting instances of it even here, where there has been no sound but the gospel heard, from the pulpits of either church or meeting, for many years. You ask what I think is the best method of removing it. I know no better, no other, than to go on praying, preaching and waiting. When we have toiled all night and have caught nothing, we have still encouragement to cast the net again. It must, it will be so, until the Lord opens the understanding—and then light shines out of darkness in a moment.

Should this ignorance be so far removed from the *head*, that people can form tolerable notions of the truths we preach—there is but little real advantage gained—unless the *heart* is changed by divine power! But the moment the heart is touched—they will begin to savingly comprehend.

A woman who had heard me for years, went home one day, and expressed a pleasing surprise that I had entirely changed my manner of preaching. "Until now," said she, "I have often listened with attention—but could never make out anything of your meaning; but this afternoon you preached so plainly, that I understood every word!" The Lord had opened her heart so suddenly, and yet so gently, that at first she thought the change was not in *herself*—but in *me*. It is well that he is pleased so to work, that we should have no pretense for taking any glory to ourselves. He lets us try and try

again, to convince us that we can do nothing by ourselves. And then, often when we give up the case as desperate—he comes and does all!

Do not you feel something of 1 Samuel 4:13, in this dark day? "When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair beside the road watching, because he was anxious about the ark of God. When the man entered the city to give a report, the entire city cried out!"

I am not a politician, much less an American; but I fear the Lord has a controversy with us. I cannot but tremble at the consequences of our present disputes, and lest the disappointment our forces met with at Charlestown should be the prelude to some more important miscarriage. The plans of our operations may, for anything I know, be well laid, according to human wisdom, and our generals and admirals well qualified and supported to carry them into execution; but I am afraid the Lord Almighty is but little acknowledged or thought of in our councils, fleets, or armies. I see the nation in general hardened into that spirit of insensibility and blind security, which in all former ages and nations has been the token and forerunner of judgment; and therefore I lay but little stress upon the *wisdom of the wise*, or the *prowess of the valiant*. I think if our sins were not ripe for visitation, the Lord would have prevented things from coming to the present extremities. I would have better hope, if I saw his own people duly impressed with the present awful appearances; but, alas, I fear that too many of the wise virgins are slumbering, if not asleep, at such a time as this! May the Lord pour out upon us a spirit of humiliation and prayer, that we may prevail, if possible, for our country; or if wrath be decreed, and there be no remedy, we may have our hearts kept in peace, and find him a sure sanctuary for ourselves. Two texts seem especially suited for our meditation, Luke 21:34-36, Revelation 3:10.

I trust the Lord will reconcile you to his will, if he removes your sister. He is all-sufficient to make up every loss; and, indeed, it is wrong to grieve much for those who are called away from sin and sorrow, to perfect and endless happiness.

I have had a growth on my thigh sixteen years; it is now threatening to get bigger, and therefore I expect soon to go to London to have it eradicated. It is not painful, and the surgeon tells me the operation will be neither difficult nor dangerous; only I must keep to the house for some weeks, until the wound is healed.

I am sincerely yours.

Letter 6

My dear sir,

My wife returns you thanks for your present and your care. What avails it for a flower, or a man or woman, to bear a good name, if degenerated from the characteristic excellencies which the name imports. A tulip that has lost its colors; or a shriveled, deformed, irregular carnation, would not long preserve their places in your parterre; much less could you allow weeds to rear their tawdry heads among your choice flowers. But, alas! how is the Lord's garden, the professing church, overrun with weeds! Almost every lily grows *among thorns* or baleful plants, which convert all the nourishment they draw from the soil into poison. A time is coming when all that he has not planted shall be rooted up. May we, as under-gardeners, be furnished with grace, wisdom, and diligence to detect, and, as much as possible, to check every root of bitterness that would spring up, both in God's garden at large, and in our own hearts.

I am like your flowers, getting apace into an *autumn* state. May the Lord grant that I may find my declension of *physical vigor*, which I must soon expect to feel, balanced by a ripeness in *judgment* and *experience*. To be sure, I have had more proofs of an evil nature and deceitful heart, than I could possibly expect or conceive of twenty years ago. I believe likewise my understanding is more enlightened into the three great mysteries of the person, love, and life of Jesus. Yet I seem to groan under darkness, coldness, and confusion, as much as ever. I must go out of the world with the same language upon my lips which I used when I first ventured to a throne of grace, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, a poor worthless sinner!" My love is faint; my services feeble and defiled; my defects, mistakes, and omissions innumerable; my imaginations are as wild as the clouds in a storm—yes, too often as foul as a common sewer!

What can I set against this mournful confession? Only this—That Christ has died for me! I believe He is able to save to the uttermost! Upon His person, worth, and promise, rests all my hope; and this is a foundation able to bear the greatest weight.

I am your sincerely affectionate and obliged.

Nine Letters to a Pastor

Letter 1

Jan. 16, 1772.

Dear Sir,

It is true that I was apprehensive from your silence, that I had offended you—but when your letter came it made me full amends. And now I am glad I wrote as I did, though I am persuaded I shall

never write to you again in the same strain. I am pleased with your gracious attitude; and your bearing so well to be told of the mistakes which I pointed out to you—endears you more to me than if you had not made them. Henceforward I can converse freely with you, and shall be glad when I have the opportunity.

Plain people are easily puzzled. I have met with many preachers who have appeared to be rather wise than warm, rather positive than humble, rather faultfinding than lively, and more disposed to talk of *speculations* than *experience*. However, let us give ourselves to the study of the Word, and to prayer; and may the great Teacher make every Scriptural truth food to our souls.

I desire to grow in knowledge—but I want nothing which has not a direct tendency to make sin more hateful, Jesus more precious to my soul; and at the same time to animate me to a diligent use of every appointed means, and an unreserved regard to every branch of duty. I think the Lord has shown me in a measure, that there is a consistent sense running through the whole Scripture, and I desire to be governed and influenced by it all. Doctrines, precepts, promises, warnings, all have their proper place and use. I think many of the errors of the present day, spring from separating those things which God has joined together, and insisting on some parts of the Word of God almost to the exclusion of the rest.

I have filled my paper with what I did not intend to say a word of when I began, and must leave other things which were more upon my mind for another season. I thank you for praying for me. Continue that kindness; I both need it and prize it.

Letter 2

July 31, 1773.

Dear Sir,

I received your sorrowful epistle yesterday; and in order to encourage you to write, I answer it today.

The ship was safe when Christ was in it—though he was really asleep. At present I can tell you good news, though you know it; He is wide awake, and his eyes are in every place! You and I, if we could be joined together, might perhaps make two tolerable ones. You are too anxious, and I am too easy in some respects. Indeed I cannot be too easy—when I have a right thought that all is safe in his hands. But if your anxiety makes you pray, and my composure makes me careless, you have certainly the best of it. However, the ark is fixed upon an immovable foundation; and if we think we see it totter, it is owing to a dizziness in our heads. Seriously, the times look dark and stormy, and call for much circumspection and prayer—but let us not forget that we have an *infallible Pilot*, and that the *power* and *wisdom* and *honor* of God are embarked with us. Jesus has both wind and weather are at his command, and he can turn the *storm* into a *calm* in a moment. We may therefore safely and confidently leave the government upon his shoulders. Duty is our part; the care is his.

A revival is needed with us, as well as with you; and I trust some of us are longing for it. We are praying and singing for one; and I send you, on the other side, a hymn, that you (if you like it) may sing with us. Let us take courage. though it may seem marvelous in our eyes, it is not so in the Lord's. He changed the *desert* into a *fruitful field*, and bid dry bones to live! And if he prepares *our heart* to pray—he will surely incline *his ear* to hear!

The miscarriages of professors are grievous—yet such things must be; how else could the Scriptures be fulfilled? But there is one who is able to keep us from falling. Some who have distressed us, perhaps never were truly converted; how then could they stand? We see only the *outside*. Others who are sincere are permitted to fall for our instruction, that we may not be high-minded, but fear. However, he who walks humbly—walks surely!

Letter 3

Feb. 22, 1774,

Dear Sir,

There is a danger of leaning to *impressions*. Texts of Scripture brought powerfully to the heart are very desirable and pleasant—if their tendency is to humble us, to give us a more feeling sense of the preciousness of Christ, or of the doctrines of grace; if they make sin more hateful, enliven our regard to the means, or increase our confidence in the power and faithfulness of God. But if they are understood, as intimating our path of duty in particular circumstances, or confirming us in purposes we may have already formed, not otherwise clearly warranted by the general strain of the Word, or by the leadings of Providence, they are for the most part ensnaring, and always to be suspected. Nor does their coming into the mind at the time of prayer give them more authority in this respect. When the mind is intent upon any subject, the *imagination* is often watchful to catch at anything which may seem to countenance the favorite pursuit. It is too common to ask counsel of the Lord—when we have already secretly determined for ourselves! And in this disposition, we may easily be deceived by the *sound* of a text of Scripture, which, detached from the passage in which it stands, may seem remarkably to tally with our wishes! Many have

been deceived this way; and sometimes, when the event has shown them they were mistaken, it has opened a door for great distress, and Satan has found occasion to make them doubt even of their most solid experiences.

I have sometimes talked to **** upon this subject, though without the least suspicion of anything like what has happened. As to the present case, it may remind us all of our weakness. I would recommend prayer, patience, much tenderness towards her, joined with faithful expostulation. Wait a little while, and I trust the Lord who loves her will break the snare. I am persuaded, in her better judgment, she would dread the thoughts of doing wrong; and I hope and believe the good Shepherd, to whom she has often committed her soul and her ways—will interpose to restore and set her right.

I am sorry you think any of whom you have hoped well, are going back—but be not discouraged. I say again, pray, and wait—and hope the best. It is common for young professors to have a slack time; it is almost necessary, that they may be more sensible of the weakness and deceitfulness of their hearts, and be more humbled in future, when the Lord shall have healed their breaches, and restored their souls. We join in love to you and yours. Pray for us.

Letter 4

Feb. 3, 1775.

Dear Sir,

It is very lawful at your age to think of marriage, and, in the situation you describe, to think of money likewise. I am glad you have no person, as you say, fixedly in view; in that case, advice comes a post or two too late. But your expression seems to intimate, that there is one transiently in view. If it is so, since you have no settlement, if she

has no money, I cannot but wish she may pass on until she is out of sight and out of mind.

I take it for granted, that you are free from the love of filthy lucre; and that money will never be the turning point with you in the choice of a wife. Methinks I hear you think, If I needed money, I would either dig or beg for it—but to preach or marry for money, that is far from me. I commend you. However, though the *love of money* is a great evil, money itself, obtained in a fair and honorable way, is desirable, upon many accounts, though not for its own sake. Food, clothes, and housing, cannot easily be had without it. Therefore, if these are necessary, money which procures them must be necessary likewise. If things were otherwise than you represent them, if you were able to provide for a wife, then I would say, Find a gracious girl (if she be not found already) whose person you like, whose temper you think will suit; and then, with your father and mother's consent (without which I think you would be unwilling to move), thank the Lord for her, marry her, and account her a valuable portion, though she should not have a shilling! But while you are without income or settlement, if you have thoughts of marriage, I hope they will be regulated by a due regard to *consequences*.

Those who set the least value upon money, have in some respects the most need of it. A generous mind will feel a thousand pangs in strait circumstances, which some unfeeling hearts would not be sensible of. You could perhaps endure hardships alone—yet it might pinch you to the very bone—to see the person you love exposed to them. Besides, you might have a *John*, a *Thomas*, and a *William*, and half a dozen more to feed (for they must all eat); and how this could be done without a sufficient income? Besides, you would be grieved not to find an occasional shilling in your pocket to bestow upon one or

another of the Lord's poor, though you should be able to make some sort of a shift for those of your own house.

But is it not written, "The Lord will provide"? It is. But it is written also, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." Hastily to plunge ourselves into difficulties, upon a persuasion that God will find some way to extricate us, seems to me a species of *tempting* him!

Therefore I judge, it is so far lawful for you to have a regard to money in looking out for a wife, that it would be wrong, that is, in other words, unlawful, for you to omit it, supposing you have a purpose of marrying in your present situation.

Many serious young women have a preference in favor of a minister of the Gospel; and I believe among such, one or more may be found as spiritual, as amiable, as suitable to make you a good wife, with a tolerable fortune to boot—as another who has not a penny. If you are not willing to trust your own judgment in the search, entreat the Lord to find her for you. He chose well for Isaac and Jacob; and you, as a believer, have warrant to commit your way to him, and many more express promises than they had for your encouragement. He knows your state, your wants, what you are at present, and what use he designs to make of you. Trust in him, and wait for him. Prayer, and faith, and patience, are never disappointed. I commend you to his blessing and guidance. Remember us to all in your house.

Letter 5

May 28, 1775.

Dear Sir,

You must not expect a long letter this morning. I am just going to *court*, in hopes of seeing the *King*, for he has promised to meet me.

We can say that he is mindful of his promise; and yet it is astonishing, that though we are all in the same place, and the King in the midst of us—it is but here and there one (even of those who love him) can see him at once. However, in our turns we are all favored with a glimpse of him, and have had cause to say, *How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty!* We have the advantage of the queen of Sheba; a more glorious object to behold, and not so far to go for the sight of it. If a *transient glance* exceeds all that the world can afford for a long continuance, what must it be to dwell with him? If a day in his courts be better than a thousand elsewhere, what will eternity be in his presence?

I hope the more you see—the more you love; the more you drink—the more you thirst; the more you do for him—the more you are ashamed you can do so little; and that the nearer you approach to your journey's end—the more your pace is quickened. Surely, the *power of spiritual attraction* should increase—as the distance lessens. O that heavenly magnet! May it so draw us that we may not creep—but run. In common traveling, the strongest become weary if the journey is very long—but in the spiritual journey we are encouraged with a hope of going on from strength to strength. No road but the road to heaven, can thus communicate refreshment to those who walk in it, and make them more fresh and lively when they are just finishing their course than when they first set out!

Letter 6

April 18, 1776.

Dear Sir,

Are you sick, or *lame of your right hand*, or are you busy in preparing a folio for the press—that I hear nothing from you? You

see by the excuses I would contrive, that I am not willing to suppose that you have forgotten me—but that your silence is rather owing to a *cannot* than a *will* not.

I hope your soul prospers. I do not ask you if you are always filled with sensible comfort—but do you find your spirit more bowed down to the feet and will of Jesus, so as to be willing to serve him for the sake of serving him, and to follow him, as we say, through thick and thin; to be willing to be anything or nothing—so that he may be glorified? I could give you plenty of good *advice* upon this head—but I am ashamed to do it, because I so poorly *follow* it myself! I want to live with him by the day, to do all for him, to receive all from him, to possess all in him, to live all to him, to make him my hiding-place and my resting-place. I want to deliver up that rebel *SELF* to him in chains—but the rogue, like Proteus, puts on so many forms, that he slips through my fingers! But I think I know what I would do if I could fairly catch him.

My soul is like a besieged city—a legion of enemies outside the gates, and a nest of restless traitors within—which hold a correspondence with those outside—so that I am deceived and undermined continually! It is a mercy that I have not been overwhelmed long ago. Without help from Jesus—it would soon be over with me. How often have I been forced to cry out, "O God, the enemies have gotten into your castle! They defiled your holy temple—and defaced all your work!" Indeed it is a miracle that I still hold out. I trust, however, I shall be supported to the end, and that my Lord will at length destroy the siege, and cause me to shout deliverance and victory!

Pray for me—that my walls may be strengthened and wounds healed. We are all pretty well as to the outward man, and join in love to all friends.

Letter 7

July 6, 1776.

Dear Sir,

I was abroad when your letter came—but employ the first post to thank you for your confidence. My *prayers* (when I can pray) you may be sure of. As to *advice*, I see not that the case requires much. *Only be a quiet child—and lie patiently at the Lord's feet*. He is the best friend and manager in these matters, for he has a key to open every heart!

I would not have taken Mr. Z****'s letter for a denial, as it seems you did. Considering the years of the parties involved, and other circumstances, a prudent parent could hardly say more, if he were inclined to favor your views. To me you seem to be in a tolerably fair way—but I know in affairs of this kind, that *Mr. Self* does not like suspense—but would like come to the point at once. But *Mr. Faith* (when he gets liberty to hold up his head) will own, that, in order to make our temporal mercies wear well, and to give us a clearer sense of the hand which bestows them—a waiting and a praying time are very seasonable.

Worldly people expect their schemes to run upon all-fours, as we say, and the objects of their wishes to drop into their mouths without difficulty; and if they succeed, they of course burn incense to themselves, and say, "This was my doing!" But believers meet with rubs and disappointments, which convince them, that if they obtain anything, it is the Lord who must do it for them. For this reason I observe, that he usually brings a *death upon our prospects*, even when it is his purpose to give us success in the outcome. Thus we become more assured that we did not act in our own selfish hearts,

and have a more satisfactory view that his providence has been concerned in *filling up the rivers* and *removing the mountains* that were in our way. Then when he has given us our desire—how pleasant is it to look at it and say, This I got, not by my own sword, and my own bow—but I wrestled for it in prayer! I waited for it in faith, I put it into the Lord's hand, and from his hand I received it.

You have met with the story of one of our kings, who wanted to send a nobleman abroad as his ambassador, and he desired to be excused on account of some affairs which required his presence at home. The king answered, "You take care of my business—and I will take care of yours." I would have you think the Lord says thus to you. You were sent into the world for a nobler end than to be pinned to a girl's apron-string! And yet if the Lord sees it not good for you to be alone, he will provide a help-mate for you. I say, if he sees the marriage state best for you, he has the proper person already in his eye. And though she were in Peru or Nova-Zembla, he knows how to bring you together. In the mean time—you go and preach the Gospel. Watch in all things; endure afflictions; do the work of an Evangelist; make full proof of your ministry. And when the *thoughts* rise in your mind (for you have no door to shut them quite out), run with them to the Throne of Grace, and commit them to the Lord! Satan will perhaps try to force them upon you unseasonably and inordinately—but if he sees they drive you to prayer, he will probably desist, rather than be the occasion of doing you so much good.

Believe likewise, that as the Lord has the appointment of the *person*, so He fixes the *time*. His time is like the time of the *tide*—all the art and power of man can neither hasten nor retard it a moment. it must be waited for; nothing can be done without it, and, when it comes, nothing can resist it. It is *unbelief* which talks of delays. *Faith* knows that, properly, there can be no such thing. The only reason why the

Lord *seems* to delay what he afterwards grants is—that the best hour is not yet come. I know you have been enabled to commit and resign your all to his disposal. You did well. May He help you to stand to the surrender. Sometimes He will put us to the trial, whether we mean what we say. He takes his course in a way we did not expect; and then, alas! how often does the trial put us to shame! Presently there is an outcry raised in the soul against *his management* of a particular situation; in short, all these things are against us! And then we go into the pulpit, and gravely tell the people how wise and how good he is; and preach submission to his will, not only as a duty—but a privilege! Alas, how deceitful is the heart! Yet since it is and will be so, it is necessary we should know it by *experience*. We have reason, however, to say, He is good and wise; for he bears with our perverseness, and in the outcome, shows us that if he had listened to our murmuring, and taken the methods we have prescribed to him, we would have been ruined indeed, and that He has been all the while doing us good—in spite of ourselves!

If I judge right, you will find your way providentially opened more and more; and yet it is possible, that when you begin to think yourself sure, something may happen to put you in a panic again. But a believer, like a sailor, is not to be surprised if the wind changes—but to learn the art of suiting himself to all winds for the time. And though many a poor sailor is shipwrecked, the poor believer shall gain his port. O it is good sailing with an *infallible Pilot* at the helm, who has the wind and weather at his command!

If I did not love you well, I would not have spared so much of the only day I have had to myself for these past two weeks. But I was willing you should know that I *think* of you and *feel* for you, if I cannot *help* you.

I have read Mr. ****'s book. Some things are strongly argued; in some he has laid himself open to a blow, and I doubt not but he will have it. I expect answers, replies, rejoinders, etc. and say with Leah, *Gad, a troop comes*. How the wolf will grin—to see the sheep and the shepherds biting and worrying one another! And well he may. He knows that contentions are a surer way to weaken the spirit of love, and stop the progress of the Gospel, than his old stale method of fire and sword. Well, we shall be of one heart and one mind when we get to heaven at least.

Let who will fight, I trust neither water nor fire shall set you and me at variance. We unite in love to you. The Lord is gracious to us, etc.

Letter 8

1776.

Dear Sir,

I do not often serve your letters so—but this last I burnt, believing you would like to have it out of danger of falling into improper hands. When I saw how eagerly the flames devoured the paper, how quickly and entirely every trace of the writing was consumed, I wished that the fire of the love of Jesus might as completely obliterate from your heart every uneasy impression which your disappointment has given you. Surely when he crosses our wishes it is always in mercy, and because we are short-sighted creatures, we often know not what we ask, nor what would be the consequences if our desires were granted.

Your *pride*, it seems, has received a fall by meeting a repulse. I know *SELF* does not like to be mortified in these affairs—but if you are made successful in wooing souls for Christ, I hope that will console you for meeting a rebuff when only wooing for yourself. Besides, I

would have you pluck up your spirits. I have a good old proverb at your service. "There are as good fish in the sea—as any which are brought out of it." Perhaps all your difficulties have arisen from this—that you have not yet met the right person. If so, you have reason to be thankful that the Lord would not let you take the wrong, though you unwittingly would have done it if you could. Where the right one lies hidden, I know not. The Lord in his providence will disclose her, put her in your way, and give you to understand, "This is she!" Then you will find your business go forward with *wheels* and *wings*, and have cause to say that His choice and time were better than your own.

Did I not tell you formerly, that if you would take care of his business—he will take care of yours? I am of the same mind still. He will not allow those who fear Him and depend upon Him, to lack anything that is truly good for them. In the mean while, I advise you to take a lodging as near as you can to *Gethsemane*, and to walk daily to *mount Golgotha*, and borrow (which may be had for asking) that telescope which gives a prospect into the unseen world. A view of what is passing within the veil has a marvelous effect to compose our spirits, with regard to the little things which are daily passing here on earth. Praise the Lord, who has enabled you to fix your supreme affection upon Him who is alone the proper and suitable object of it, and from whom you cannot meet a denial or fear a change. He loved you first, and He will love you forever; and if He is pleased to arise and smile upon you, you are in no more necessity of begging for happiness to the prettiest creature upon earth, than of the light of a candle on Midsummer noon.

Upon the whole, I pray and hope the Lord will sweeten your cross, and either in kind or in kindness, make you good amends. Wait, pray, and believe—and all shall be well. A cross we must have

somewhere; and those who are favored with health, plenty, peace, and a conscience sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, must have more causes for thankfulness than grief. Look round you, and take notice of the very severe afflictions which many of the Lord's own people are groaning under, and your trials will appear comparatively light.

Our love to all friends.

Letter 9

June 3, 1777.

Dear Sir,

It seems I must write something about the **smallpox**—but I know not well what. Not having had it myself, I cannot judge how I would feel if I were actually exposed to it. I am not a professed advocate for *inoculation*.

But if a person who fears the Lord should tell me—"I think I can do it in faith, looking upon it as a beneficial expedient, which God in his providence has revealed, and which therefore appears my duty to have recourse to, so that my mind does not hesitate with respect to the lawfulness, nor am I anxious about the event; being satisfied, that whether I live or die, I am in that path in which I can cheerfully expect his blessing;" —I do not know that I could offer a word by way of dissuasion.

If another person should say—"My times are in the Lord's hands; I am now in health, and am not willing to bring upon myself a disorder, the consequences of which I cannot possibly foresee. If I am to have the smallpox, I believe he is the best judge of the season and manner in which I shall be visited, so as may be most for his glory and my own good; and therefore I choose to wait his

appointment, and not to rush upon even the possibility of danger without a call. If the very hairs of my head are numbered, I have no reason to fear that, supposing I receive the smallpox in a natural way, I shall have a single pimple more than he sees expedient; and why should I wish to have one less? Nay, admitting, which however is not always the case, that inoculation might exempt me from some pain and inconvenience, and lessen the apparent danger, might it not likewise, upon that very account, prevent my receiving some of those sweet consolations which I humbly hope my gracious Lord would afford me, if it were his pleasure to call me to a sharp trial? Perhaps the chief design of this trying hour, if it comes, may be to show me more of his wisdom, power, and love, than I have ever yet experienced. If I could devise a means to avoid the trouble, I know not how great a loser I may be in point of grace and comfort. Nor am I afraid of my face—it is now as the Lord, has made it, and it will be so after the smallpox. If it pleases him, I hope it will please me. In short, though I do not censure others—yet, as to myself, inoculation is what I dare not venture upon. If I did venture, and the outcome should not be favorable, I would blame myself for having attempted to take the management out of the Lord's hands, into my own; which I never did yet in other matters, without finding I am no more able than I am worthy to choose for myself. Besides, at the best, inoculation would only secure me from one of the *innumerable natural evils* the flesh is heir to. I would still be as liable as I am at present to a putrid fever, a bilious colic, an inflammation in the stomach, or in the brain, and a thousand formidable diseases which are hovering round me—and only wait his permission to cut me off in a few days or hours. And therefore I am determined, by his grace, to resign myself to his disposal. Let me fall into the hands of the Lord (for his mercies are great), and not into the hands of men!"

If a person should talk to me in this strain, most certainly I could not say, "Notwithstanding all this, your safest way is to be inoculated."

We preach and hear, and I hope we know something of faith—as enabling us to trust the Lord with our *souls*. I wish we had all more faith to trust him with our *bodies*, our health, our provision, and our temporal comforts likewise. The former should seem to require the strongest faith of the two! How strange is it, that when we think we can do the greater, we should be so awkward and unskillful when we aim at the less?

Give my love to your friend. I dare not advise—but if she can quietly return at the usual time, and neither run intentionally into the way of the smallpox, nor run out of the way—but leave it simply with the Lord, I shall not blame her. And if you will mind your praying and preaching, and believe that the Lord can take care of her without any of your contrivances, I shall not blame you. Nay, I shall praise him for you both. My prescription is to read Psalm 121 every morning before breakfast, and pray it over until the cure is effected.

"I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore!" Psalm 121:1-8

Six Letters to a Pastor

Letter 1

Sept. 14, 1765.

Dear Sir,

When I was at London last June, your name first reached me, and from that time I have been desirous to wish you success in the name of the Lord. A few weeks ago I received a further account from Mrs. ****, with a volume of your sermons. She likewise gave me a direction where to write, and an encouragement that a letter would not be unacceptable. The latter indeed I did not much need when I had read your book. Though we have no acquaintance, we are already united in the strictest ties of friendship, partakers of the same hope, servants of the same Lord, and in the same part of his vineyard. I therefore hold all apologies needless. I rejoice in the Lord's goodness to you; I pray for his abundant blessing upon your labors; I need an interest in your prayers; I have an affectionate desire to know more concerning you. these are my motives for writing.

Mrs.**** tells me that you have read my *Narrative*. I need not tell you, therefore, that I am one of the most astonishing instances of the forbearance and mercy of God upon the face of the earth. In the close of it, I mention a warm desire I had to the ministry. This the Lord was pleased to keep alive for several years, through a succession of views and disappointments. At length his hour came, and my way was made easy. I have been here about fifteenth months. The Lord has led me by a way that I little expected, to a pleasant lot, where the Gospel has been many years known, and is highly valued by many. We have a large church and congregation, and a considerable number of lively thriving believers, and in general go on with great

comfort and harmony. I meet with less opposition from the world than is usual where the Gospel is preached. This burden was borne by Mr. B**** for ten years; and in that course of time some of the fiercest opposers were removed, some wearied, and some softened; so that we are now remarkably quiet in that respect. May the Lord teach us to improve the privilege, and preserve us from indifference.

How unspeakable are our obligations to the grace of God! What a privilege is it to be a *believer*! They are comparatively few, and we by nature were no nearer than others—it was grace, free grace, which made the difference! What an honor to be a *minister* of the everlasting Gospel! These upon comparison are perhaps fewer still. How wonderful that one of these few should be sought for among the wilds of Africa, reclaimed from the lowest state of impiety and misery, and brought to assure other sinners, from his own experience, that "there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared."

And you, sir, though not left to give such flagrant proofs of the wickedness of the heart and the power of Satan—yet owe your present views to the same almighty grace. If the Lord had not distinguished you from your brethren, you would have been now in the character of a false minister, misleading the people, and opposing those precious truths you are now laboring to establish. Not unto us, O Lord—but unto your name be the glory! I shall be thankful to hear from you at your leisure. Be pleased to inform me whether you received the knowledge of the truth before or since you were in the ministry; how long you have preached the joyful sound of salvation by Jesus; and what is the state of things in your parts.

We are called to an *honorable* service—but it is *arduous*. What *wisdom* does it require to keep the middle path in doctrines,

avoiding the equally dangerous errors on the right hand and the left! What *steadiness*, to speak the truth boldly and faithfully in the midst of a gainsaying world! What *humility*, to stand against the tide of popularity! What *meekness*, to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may be saved! "Who is sufficient for these things?" We are not in ourselves—but there is an all-sufficiency in Jesus.

Our enemy watches us closely; he desires to have us, that he may sift us as wheat. He knows he can easily shake us—if we are left to ourselves. But we have a Shepherd, a Keeper, who never slumbers nor sleeps! If he permits us to be exercised, it is for our good; he is at hand to direct, moderate, and sanctify every dispensation. He has prayed for us—that our faith may not fail; and he has promised to maintain his *fear* in our hearts, that we may not depart from him. When we are prone to wander—he calls us back; when we say, "my feet slip"—his mercy holds us up; when we are wounded—he heals us; when we are ready to faint, he revives us.

The *people* of God are sure to meet with enemies—but especially the *ministers*. Satan bears them a double grudge. The world watches for their halting, and the Lord will allow them to be afflicted, that they may be kept humble, that they may acquire a sympathy with the sufferings of others, that they may be experimentally qualified to advise and help them, and to comfort them with the comforts with which they themselves have been comforted of God. But the Captain of our salvation is with us. His *eye* is upon us; his everlasting *arm* beneath us. In his name therefore may we go on, lift up our banners, and say, "If God be for us—who can be against us? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him who has loved us!" The time is short. In a little while—he will wipe all tears from our eyes, and put a crown of life upon our heads with his own gracious hand!

If any occasions should call you into these parts, my house and pulpit will be glad to receive you. Pray for us, dear sir!

Letter 2

Nov. 2, 1765.

Very dear Sir,

Your last letter gave me great pleasure. I thank you for the particular account you have favored me with. I rejoice with you, sympathize with you, and find my heart opened to correspond with unreserved freedom. May the Lord direct our pens, and help us to help each other. The work you are engaged in is great, and your difficulties many—but faithful is he who has called you, who also will do it. The weapons which he has now put into your hands are not carnal—but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds. Men may *fight*—but they shall not *prevail* against us, if we are but enabled to put our cause simply into the Lord's hands, and keep steadily on in the path of duty. He will plead our cause, and fight our battles; he will pardon our mistakes, and teach us to do better.

My experience as a minister is but small, having been but about eighteen months in the vineyard—but for about twelve years I have been favored with an increasing acquaintance among the people of God, of various ranks and denominations, which, together with the painful exercises of my own heart, gave me opportunity of making observations which were of great use to me when I entered upon the work myself. And ever since, I have found the Lord graciously supplying new lights and new strength, as new occurrences arise. So I trust it will be with you. I endeavor to avail myself of the examples, advice, and sentiments of my brethren—yet at the same time to guard against calling any man *master*. This is the peculiar of Christ.

The best of men—are but men; the wisest may be mistaken; and that which may be right in another—might be wrong in me, through a difference of circumstances. The Spirit of God distributes his gifts variously; and I would no more be tied to act strictly by others' rules—than to walk in shoes of the same size. My shoes must fit my own feet.

I endeavor to guard against *extremes*. Our nature is prone to them, and we are liable likewise, when we have found the inconvenience of one extreme, to revert insensibly (sometimes to fly suddenly) to the other. I pray to be led in the *middle* of the path. I am what they call a *Calvinist*—yet there are particularities and hard sayings to be found among some of that system, which I do not choose to imitate. I dislike those sentiments against which you have borne your testimony in the note at the end of your preface. But, having known many precious souls in that party, I have been taught, that the kingdom of God is not in *names* and *theological sentiments*—but in righteousness, faith, love, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

I would, however, upon some occasions oppose those tenets, if they had any prevalence in my neighborhood—but they have not. In general, *I believe the surest way to refute or prevent error—is to preach the truth*. I am glad to find you are aware of that spirit of enthusiasm which has so often broken loose and blemished hopeful beginnings, and that the foundation you build upon is solid and Scriptural. This will, I hope, save you much trouble, and prevent many offenses. Let us endeavor to make our people acquainted with the *Scripture*, and to impress them with a high sense of its authority, excellence, and sufficiency. Satan seldom remarkably imposes on ministers or people, except where the Word of God is too little consulted or regarded.

Another point in which I aim at a medium, is in what is called prudence. There is certainly such a thing as Christian prudence, and a remarkable deficiency of it is harmful. But *caution* too often degenerates into *cowardice*; and if the *fear of man*, under the name of *prudence*, gets within our guard, like a chilling frost it nips everything in the bud. Those who trust the Lord, and act openly, with an honest freedom and consistency, I observe that God generally bears them out, smooths their way, and makes their enemies their friends, or at least restrains their rage. While such as *halve* things, *temporize*, and aim to please God and man together, meet with double disappointment, and are neither useful nor respected. If we trust to Him—He will stand by us; if we regard men—He will leave us to make the best we can of them.

I have set down hastily what occurred to my pen, not to dictate to you—but to tell you how I have been led, and because some expressions in your letter seemed to imply that you would not be displeased with me for so doing. As to books, I think there is a medium here likewise. I have read too much in time past—yet I do not wholly join with some of our brethren, who would restrain us entirely to the Word of God. Undoubtedly this is the fountain; here we should dwell—but a moderate and judicious perusal of other authors may have its use; and I am glad to be indebted to such helps, either to explain what I do not understand, or to confirm me in what I do. Of these, the writings of the last age afford an immense variety.

But, above all, may we, dear sir, live and feed upon the precious promises, John 14:16, John 14:17, John 14:26; and John 16:13-15. There is no teacher like Jesus, who by his Holy Spirit reveals himself in his Word—to the understanding and affections of his children. When we thus behold his glory in the Gospel looking-glass, we are changed into his image. Then our hearts melt, our eyes flow, our

stammering tongues are unloosed. That this may be your increasing experience, is my sincere prayer.

Letter 3

Jan. 21, 1766.

Dear Sir,

Your letters give me the sincerest pleasure. Let us believe that we are daily thinking of and praying for each other, and write when opportunity offers, without apologies. I praise the Lord that he has led you so soon to a settled judgment in the leading truths of the Gospel. For lack of this, many have been necessitated with their own hands to pull down what, in the first warm emotions of their zeal, they had labored hard to build. It is a mercy, likewise, to be enabled to acknowledge what is excellent in the writings or conduct of others, without adopting their singularities, or discarding the *whole*—on account of a few *blemishes*. We should be glad to receive instruction from all, and avoid being wholly led by any. We have one master, even Christ.

We may grow wise quickly in opinions—by learning from books and men—but *vital, experimental knowledge* can only be received from the Holy Spirit, the great instructor and comforter of his people. And there are two things observable in his teaching:

1. That he honors the *means* of his own appointment, so that we cannot expect to make any great progress without diligence on our part.
2. That he does not teach all at once—but by degrees. *Experience* is his school; and by this I mean the observation and improvement of what passes within us and around us in the course of every day.

The Word of God affords a history in miniature, of the heart of man, the devices of Satan, the state of the world, and the method of grace. And the most instructing and affecting commentary on it, to an enlightened mind, may be gathered from what we see, feel, and hear from day to day. No knowledge in spiritual things but what we acquire in this way, is properly our own, or will abide the time of trial.

This is not always sufficiently considered. We are ready to expect that others should receive upon our testimony, in half an hour's time, those views of things which have cost us years to attain! But none can be brought forward faster than the Lord is pleased to communicate inward light. Upon this ground controversies have been multiplied among Christians to little purpose; for plants of different standings will be in different degrees of growth.

A young Christian is like a green fruit—it has perhaps a disagreeable austerity, which cannot be corrected out of its proper course; it needs time and growth. Wait a while, and, by the nourishment it receives from the root, together with the action of the sun, wind, and rain in succession from without—it will insensibly acquire that flavor and maturity for the lack of which, an unskillful judge would be ready to reject it as nothing worth.

We are favored with many excellent books in our tongue—but I with you agree in assigning one of the first places (as a teacher) to John Owen. I have just finished his Discourse on the Holy Spirit, which is an epitome, if not the master-piece, of his writings. I would be glad to see the republication you speak of—but I question if the booksellers will venture upon it. I shall perhaps mention it to my London friends. As to Robert Leighton, besides his Select Works, there are two octavo volumes, published at Edinburgh in the year

1748, and since reprinted at London. They contain a valuable Commentary on Peter's First Epistle, and Lectures on Isaiah six, Psalm 39:1-13, Psalm 134:1-3, and a part of Romans 12. I have likewise a small quarto, in Latin, of his Divinity Lectures, when professor at Edinburgh. Mine was printed in London 1698. I believe this book is scarce. I set the highest value upon it. He has wonderfully united the simplicity of the Gospel with all the captivating beauties of style and language. Burner says he was the greatest master of the Latin tongue he ever new; of which, together with his compass of learning, he has given proof in his Lectures. Yet, in his gayer dress, his eminent humility and spirituality appear to no less advantage than when clad in plain English. I think it may be said to be a *diamond set in gold*. I could wish it translated, if it was possible (which I almost question) to preserve the beauty and spirit of the original.

Jonathan Edwards on *Free Will*, I have read with pleasure, as a good answer to the proud reasoners in their own way—but a book of that sort cannot be *generally* read. Where the subject matter is unpleasing, and the method of treating it requires more attention than the Athenian spirit of the times will bear, I do not wonder that it is uncalled for.

You send us good news indeed, that two more of your brethren are declaring on the Gospel side. May the Lord confirm and strengthen them, add yet to your numbers, and make you helps and comforts to each other. Surely he is about to spread his work. Happy are those whom he honors to be fellow-workers with him. Let us account the disgrace we suffer for his Name's sake—to be our great honor. Many will be against us—but there are more for us. All the praying souls on earth, all the glorified saints in heaven, all the angels of God, yes, the God of angels himself—all are on our side. Satan may rage—but he is

a *chained enemy*. Men may contend and fight—but they cannot prevail.

Two things we shall especially need—courage and patience, that we neither faint before them, nor upon any provocation act in their spirit. If we can *pity* and *pray* for them, return good for evil, make them sensible that we bear them a hearty good-will, and act as the disciples of Him who *wept* for his enemies, and *prayed* for his murderers—in this way we shall find the Lord will plead our cause, soften opposers, and by degrees give us a measure of outward peace. Blind zeal and imprudence have often added to the burden of the cross. I rejoice that the Lord has led you in a different way; and I hope your *doctrine* and *example* will make your path smoother every day—you find it so in part already. As the Lord calls out a people, and witnesses for you to the truth of his Word—you will find advantage in bringing them often together. The interval from Sabbath to Sabbath is a good while, and affords time for the world and Satan to creep in. Intermediate meetings for prayer, etc., when properly conducted, are greatly useful. I could wish for larger sheets and longer leisure—but I am constrained to say adieu, in our dear Lord and Savior.

Letter 4

Dec. 12, 1767.

Dear Sir,

This is not intended as an answer to your last kind letter—but an occasional line, in consequence of the account Mr. T**** has given me of your late illness. I trust this dispensation will be useful to you; and I wish the knowledge of it may be so to me. I am favored with an unusual share of good health, and an equal flow of spirits. If the blow you have received should be a warning to me, I shall have cause to be

thankful. I am glad to hear you are better; I hope the Lord has no design to disable you from service—but rather (as he did Jacob) to *strengthen* you by *wounding* you; to maintain and increase in you that conviction which, through grace, you have received—of the vanity and uncertainty of everything below; to give you a lively sense of the value of health and opportunities; and to add to the treasury of your experience—new proofs of his power and goodness, in supporting, comforting, and healing you; and likewise to quicken the prayers of your people for you, and to stir them up to use double diligence in the present improvement of the means of grace, while by this late instance they see how soon and suddenly you might have been removed from them.

I understand you did not feel that lively exercise of faith and joy which you would have hoped to have found at such a season. But let not this discourage you from a firm confidence, that, when the hour of death shall come, the Lord will be faithful to his gracious promise, and give you strength sufficient to encounter and vanquish your *last enemy*. You had not this strength lately, because you needed it not. for though you might think yourself near to death, the Lord intended to restore you, and he permitted you to feel your weakness, that you might know your strength does not consist in *grace received*—but in his fullness, and his promise to communicate from himself as your occasions require. Oh, it is a great thing to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus! but it is a hard lesson. It is not easy to understand it in theory—but, when the Lord has taught us so far, it is still more difficult to reduce our *knowledge* to *practice*.

But this is one end he has in view in permitting us to pass through such a variety of inward and outward trials, that we may cease from trusting in *ourselves*, or in any *creature* or *frame* or *experiences*, and be brought to a state of submission and dependence upon him alone.

I was once visited something in the same way, seized with a fit of the apoplectic kind, which held me near an hour, and left a disorder in my head which quite broke the scheme of life! This was, consequently, one of the means the Lord appointed to bring me into the ministry—but I soon perfectly recovered.

I think dear Mr. **** some years since, had a sudden stroke on a Christmas day, which disabled him from duty for a time. To him and to myself, these turns were only like the caution which Philip of Macedon ordered to be repeated to him every morning, "Remember you are *mortal*." I hope it will be no more to you—but that you shall live to praise him, and to give many cause to praise him on your behalf.

Blessed be God—we are in safe hands! The Lord himself is our keeper; nothing befalls us but what is adjusted by his wisdom and love. Health is his gift; and sickness, when sanctified, is a token of his love likewise. Here we may meet with many things which are not joyous—but grievous to the flesh—but he will in one way or other sweeten every bitter cup, and before long he will wipe away all tears from our eyes. Oh that *joy*, that *crown*, that *glory*—which awaits the believer! Let us keep the prize of our high calling in view, and press forward in the name of Jesus the Redeemer, and he will not disappoint our hopes.

I am but just come off from a journey, am weary, and it grows late; must therefore break off. When you have leisure and strength to write, gratify me with a confirmation of your recovery, for I shall be somewhat anxious about you.

Letter 5

March 14, 1775.

My dear Friend,

I thought you long in writing—but am afraid I have been longer. A heavy family affliction called me from home in December, which put me out of my usual course, and threw me behind-hand in my correspondence—yet I did not suspect the date of your last letter was so old by two months as I now find it. Whether I write more frequently or more seldom—the love of my heart to you is the same; and I shall believe the like of you—yet, if it can be helped, I hope the interval will not be so long again on either side.

I am glad that the Lord's work still flourishes in your parts, and that you have a more comfortable prospect at home than formerly. I was pleased with the acceptance you found at S****; which I hope will be a pledge of greater things. I think affairs in general, with respect to this land, have a dark appearance—but it is comfortable to observe, that, amidst the abounding of iniquity, the Lord is spreading his Gospel; and that, though many oppose—yet in most places where the Word is sent, great numbers seem disposed to hear. I am going (if the Lord pleases) into Leicestershire on Friday. This was lately such a dark place as you describe your country to be, and much of it is so still—but the Lord has visited three of the principal towns with Gospel light. I have a desire of visiting these brethren in the vineyard, to bear my poor testimony to the truths they preach, and to catch, if I may, a little fire and fervor among them.

I do not often go abroad—but I have found a little excursion now and then (when the way is made plain) has its advantages, to quicken the spirits, and enlarge the sphere of observation. On these accounts, the recollection of my last journey gives me pleasure to this day; and

very glad would I be to repeat it—but the distance is so great, that I consider it rather as *desirable* than *practical*.

My experiences vary as well as yours. But possibly your sensations, both of the sweet and of the bitter, may be stronger than mine. The enemy assaults me more by *sap*—than by *storm*; and I am ready to think I suffer more by languor than some of my friends do—by the sharper conflicts to which they are called. So likewise, in those seasons which comparatively I call my best hours, my sensible comforts are far from lively. But I am in general, enabled to hold fast my confidence, and to venture myself upon the power, faithfulness, and compassion of that adorable Savior to whom my soul has been directed and encouraged to flee for refuge! I am a poor, changeable, inconsistent creature—but he deals graciously with me. He does not leave me wholly to myself—but I have such daily proofs of the malignity and efficacy of the sin that dwelt in me, as ought to cover me with shame and confusion of face, and make me thankful if I am permitted to rank with the lowest of those who sit at his feet. That I was ever *called* to the knowledge of his salvation, was a singular instance of his sovereign grace; and that I am still *preserved* in the way, in defiance of all that has arisen from within and from without to turn me aside—must be wholly ascribed to the same sovereignty! And if, as I trust, he shall be pleased to make me a conqueror at last, I shall have peculiar reason to say, *Not unto me, not unto me—but unto your name, O Lord, be the glory and the praise!*

How oft have sin and Satan strove
To rend my soul from you, my God!
But everlasting is your love,
And Jesus seals it with his blood.

The Lord leads me, in the course of my preaching, to insist much on a life of communion with himself, and of the great design of the Gospel to render us conformable to him in love. And as, by his mercy, nothing appears in my outward conduct remarkably to contradict what I say—many, who only can judge by what they see, suppose I live a very happy life. But, alas! if they knew what passes in my heart, how dull my spirit is in secret, and how little I am myself affected by the glorious truths I propose to others—they would form a different judgment! Could I *be* myself what I *recommend* to them—I would be happy indeed. Pray for me, my dear friend, that, now the Lord is bringing forward the pleasing spring, he may favor me with a spring season in my soul; for indeed I mourn under a long winter.

Letter 6

April 16, 1772.

My dear Friend,

I hope the Lord has contracted my desires and aims almost to the one point of study—the knowledge of his truth. All other acquisitions are transient, and comparatively vain! *And yet, alas! I am a slow scholar!* Nor can I see in what respect I get forward, unless that every day I am more confirmed in the conviction of my own emptiness and inability to all spiritual good. And as, notwithstanding this, I am still enabled to stand my ground, I would hope, since no effect can be without an adequate cause, that I have made some *advance*, though in a manner *imperceptible* to myself, towards a more simple dependence upon Jesus as my all in all. It is given me to *thirst* and to *taste*, if it is not given me to *drink abundantly*; and I am thankful for the desire.

I see and approve the wisdom, grace, suitableness, and sufficiency of Gospel salvation; and since it is for sinners, and I am a sinner, and the promises are open—I do not hesitate to call it mine. I am a weary, heavy-laden soul; Jesus has invited me to come, and has enabled me to put my trust in him. I seldom have an uneasy doubt, at least not of any continuance, respecting my pardon, acceptance, and saving interest in all the blessings of the New Testament. And, amidst a thousand infirmities and evils under which I groan, I have the testimony of my conscience, when under the trial of his Word, that my desire is sincerely towards him, that I choose no other portion, that I allowedly serve no other master.

When I told this to our friend lately—he wondered, and asked, "How is it possible, that, if you can say these things, you should not be always rejoicing?" Undoubtedly I derive from the Gospel a peace at bottom, which is worth more than a thousand worlds. But though I rest and live upon the truths of the Gospel—they seldom impress me with a warm and lively joy. In public, indeed, I sometimes seem in earnest and much affected—but even then it appears to me rather as a part of the gift entrusted to me for the edification of others, than as a sensation which is properly my own. For when I am in private, I am usually dull and stupid to a strange degree, or the prey to a wild and ungoverned imagination; so that I may truly say, *when I would do good, evil, horrid evil, is present with me!*

Ah, how different is this from sensible comfort! and if I was to compare myself to others, to make their experience my standard, and was not helped to retreat to the sure Word of God as my refuge, how hard would I find it to maintain a hope that I had either part or lot in the matter! What I call my *best times*, are when I can find my attention in some little measure fixed to what I am about; which indeed is not always, nor frequently, my case in prayer, and still

seldom in reading the Scripture. My judgment embraces these means as blessed privileges, and Satan has not prevailed to drive me from them. But in the *performance* of them, I too often find them *tasks*; feel a reluctance when the seasons return, and am glad when they are finished. O what a *mystery* is the heart of man! What a warfare is the *life of faith!* (at least in the path the Lord is pleased to lead me.) What reason have I to lie in the dust as the chief of sinners, and what cause for thankfulness that salvation is wholly of grace!

Notwithstanding all my complaints, it is still true that Jesus died and rose again; that he ever lives to make intercession, and is able to save to the uttermost! But, on the other hand, to think of that joy of heart in which some of his people live, and to compare it with that apparent deadness and lack of spirituality which I feel—this makes me mourn. However, I think there is a Scriptural distinction between faith and feeling, grace and comfort—they are not inseparable, and perhaps, when together, the degree of the one is not often the just measure of the other. But though I pray that I may be ever longing and panting for the light of his countenance—yet I would be so far satisfied, as to believe the Lord has wise and merciful reasons for keeping me so short of the comforts which he has taught me to *desire* and *value* more than the light of the sun!

Three Letters to a Friend

Letter 1

Dear friend,

Long and often I have thought of writing to you—and now the time is come. May the Lord help me to send a word in season! I know not how it may be with you—but God does; and to him I look to direct my

thoughts accordingly. I suppose you are still in the school of the cross, learning the happy art of extracting real good—out of apparent evil; and to grow tall in grace—by stooping in humility. The flesh is a sad vexing dunce in this school—but grace makes the spirit willing to learn by suffering. Yes, it cares not what it endures—just so long as sin may be mortified, and a conformity to the image of Jesus be increased.

Surely when we see the most and the best of the Lord's children so often in heaviness, and when we consider how much he *loves* them, and what he has *done* and *prepared* for them—we may take it for granted that there is a need-be for their sufferings. For it would be easy to his *power*, and not a thousandth part of what his *love* intends to do for them, should he make their whole life here, from the hour of their conversion to their death, a continued course of satisfaction and comfort, without anything to distress them from within or without. But were it so, would we not miss many advantages?

In the first place, we would not then be very conformable to our Head, nor be able to say, *As he was, so are we in this world*. Methinks a believer would be ashamed to be so utterly unlike his Lord. What! the *Master* always a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief—and the *servant* always happy and full of comfort! *Jesus* despised, reproached, neglected, opposed, and betrayed—and *his people* admired and caressed! *He* living in the need of all things—and *they* filled with abundance! *He* sweating blood for anguish—and they strangers to distress! How unsuitable would these things be! How much better to be called to the honor of filling up the measure of his sufferings! A cup of suffering was put into his hand on our account—and his love engaged him to drink it for us. The wrath which it contained, he *drank* wholly himself—but he left us a little affliction to

taste, that we might remember how he loved us, and how much more he endured for us than he will ever call us to endure for him.

Again, how could we manifest the nature and truth of Gospel-grace, without sufferings? What place would we then have for patience, submission, meekness, forbearance, and a readiness to forgive—if we had nothing to try us either from the hand of the Lord or from the hand of men. A Christian without trials would be like a mill without wind or water. The mechanism and design of the wheel-work within, would be unnoticed and unknown, without something to put it in motion from without.

Nor would our graces grow, unless they were called out to exercise. The difficulties we meet with, not only *prove*—but *strengthen* the graces of the Spirit. If a person was always to sit still, without making use of legs or arms, he would probably wholly lose the power of moving his limbs at last—but by walking and working he becomes strong and active. So, in a long course of ease, the powers of the new man would certainly languish; the soul would grow soft, indolent, cowardly, and faint; and therefore the Lord appoints his children such trials as make them strive, and struggle, and pant. They must press through a crowd, swim against a stream, endure hardships, run, wrestle, and fight; and thus their strength *grows* in the *using*.

By these things likewise, they are made more willing to leave the present world—to which we are prone to cleave too closely in our hearts when our path is very smooth. Had Israel enjoyed their former peace and prosperity in Egypt, when Moses came to invite them to Canaan, I think they would hardly have listened to him. But the Lord allowed them to be brought into great trouble and bondage, and then the news of deliverance was more welcome—yet still they were but half willing, and they carried a love to the flesh-pots of

Egypt with them into the wilderness. We are just like them. Though we say this world is vain and sinful, we are too fond of it; and though we hope for true happiness only in heaven, we are often well content to stay longer here. But the Lord sends afflictions one after another—to quicken our desires, and to convince us that this poor world cannot be our rest. Sometimes if you drive a bird from one branch of a tree, he will hop to another a little higher, and from thence to a third—but if you continue to disturb him, he will at last take wing, and fly quite away. Thus we, when forced from one creature-comfort, we perch upon another, and so on—but the Lord mercifully follows us with trials, and will not let us rest upon any. By degrees our desires take a nobler flight, and can be satisfied with nothing short of himself; and we say, *"To depart and be with Jesus is best of all."*

I trust you find the name and grace of Jesus, to be more and more precious to you. May His promises be more sweet, and your hope in them more abiding. May your sense of your own weakness and unworthiness be daily increasing. May your persuasion of his all-sufficiency to guide, support, and comfort you—be more confirmed. You owe your growth in these respects, in a great measure—to his blessing upon those afflictions which he has prepared for you and sanctified to you. May you praise him for all that is past—and trust him for all that is to come.

Letter 2

Dear friend,

Though I have the pleasure of hearing of you, and sending a remembrance from time to time, I am willing by this opportunity to direct a few lines to you, as a more express testimony of my sincere regard.

I think your experience is generally of the fearful, doubting cast. Such souls, however, the Lord has given particular charge to his ministers to comfort. He knows our infirmities, and what temptations mean; and, as a good Shepherd, he expresses a peculiar care and tenderness for the weak of the flock, "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." Isaiah 40:11. But how must I attempt your comfort? Surely not by strengthening a mistake to which we are all too liable, by leading you to look into *your own heart* for (what you will never find there) something in yourself whereon to ground your hopes, if not wholly—yet at least in part. Rather let me endeavor to lead you *out* of yourself. Let me invite you to look unto *Jesus!* Should we look for *light* in our own eyes—or in the sun?

Is it *indwelling sin* which distresses you? Then I can tell you (though you know it) that Jesus died for sin and sinners. I can tell you, that his blood and righteousness are of infinite value; that his arm is almighty, and his compassions infinite. Yes, you yourself read his promises every day, and why should you doubt their being fulfilled? If you say you do not question their truth, or that they are accomplished to many others—but that you can hardly believe they belong to *you*; I would ask, what evidence you would require? A voice, or an angel from heaven—you do not expect. Consider, if many of the promises are not expressly directed to those to whom they belong. When you read your name on the superscription of *this letter*, you made no scruple to open it. Why then do you hesitate at embracing the promises of the Gospel; where you read that they are addressed to those who mourn, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are poor in spirit, etc., and cannot but be sensible that a gracious God has begun to work these dispositions in *your* heart.

If you say, that though you do at times mourn, hunger, etc., you are afraid you do not do it enough—or not aright. Then consider, that this sort of reasoning is very far from the spirit and language of the Gospel; for it is grounded on a secret supposition, that in the forgiveness of sin, God has a respect to something more than the atonement and mediation of Jesus; namely, to some previous good qualifications in a sinner's heart, which are to share with the blood of Christ in the honor of salvation. The enemy deceives us in this matter the more easily, because a propensity to the covenant of works is a part of our natural depravity. Depend upon it, you will never have a suitable and sufficient sense of the evil of sin, and of your share in it, so long as you have any sin remaining in you. We must see Jesus as he is, before our apprehensions of any spiritual truth will be complete. But if we know that we must perish without Christ, and that he is able to save to the uttermost, we know enough to warrant us to cast our souls upon him, and we dishonor him by fearing that when we do so—that he will disappoint our hope.

But if you are still *perplexed* about the high points of election, etc. I would advise you to leave the disposal of others to the great Judge. And as to yourself, I think I need not say much to persuade you, that if ever you are saved at all—it must be in a way of free and absolute grace. Leave *disputes* to others; wait upon the Lord, and he will teach you all things, in such degree and time as he sees best. Perhaps you have suffered for taking things too much upon trust from men. "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." One is your master, even Christ. Study and pray over the Bible; and you may take it as a sure rule, that whatever sentiment makes any part of the Word of God unwelcome to you—is justly to be suspected. Aim at a cheerful spirit. The more you trust God, the better you will serve him. While you indulge unbelief and suspicion, you weaken your own hands and discourage others. Be thankful for what he has shown you, and wait

upon him for more. You shall find he has not said, "Seek my face" in vain. I heartily commend you to his grace and care.

Letter 3

Dear friend,

At length, and without farther apology for my silence, I sit down to ask you how you fare? *Afflictions*, I hear, have been your lot; and if I had not heard so, I would have taken it for granted. For I believe the Lord loves you; and as many as he loves—he chastens. I think you can say that *afflictions* have been good for you, and I doubt not but you have found strength according to your day; so that though you may have been sharply tried—you have not been overpowered. For the Lord has engaged his faithfulness for this to all his children—that he will support them in all their trials—so that the fire shall not consume them, nor the floods drown them, 1Co. 10:13; Isaiah 43:2.

If you can say thus much, cannot you go a little further, and add, in the Apostle's words, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear. I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; yes, doubtless, I count all things loss and of no regard, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for when I am weak, then I am strong?" Methinks I hear you say, 'God, who comforts those who are cast down, has comforted my soul, and as my troubles have abounded—my consolations in Christ have abounded also. He has delivered, he does deliver, and in him I trust that he will yet deliver me!' Surely you can set your seal to these words. May the Lord help you then to live more and more a life of faith, to feed upon the promises, and to rejoice in the assurance that all things are yours, and shall surely work for your good.

If I guess right at what passes in your heart, the name of Jesus is precious to you; and this is a sure token of God's salvation. You could not have loved him—if he had not loved you first. He spoke to you, and said, "Seek my face," before your heart cried to him "Your face, O Lord, will I seek." But you bemoan, "Alas! I love him so little." That very mourning proves that you love him a great deal. For if you loved him but a little—you would think you loved him enough. A mother loves her child a great deal—yet does not complain for not loving it more; nay, perhaps she hardly thinks it possible. But such an *infinite object is Jesus*, that those who love him better than parents or child, or any earthly relation or comfort—will still think they hardly love him at all; because they see such a vast disproportion between the utmost they can give him—and what in himself he deserves from them.

But I can give you good advice and good news—love him as well as you can now, and before long you shall love him better. O when you see him as he is—then I am sure you will love him indeed! If you want to love him better now while you are here, I believe I can tell you the secret how this is to be attained: Trust him. The more you *trust* him—the better you will *love* him. If you ask farther, How shall I do to trust him? I answer: Try him. the more you make trial of him, the more your trust in him will be strengthened. Venture upon his promises; carry them to him, and see if he will not be as good as his Word. But, alas! Satan and unbelief work the contrary way. We are unwilling to try him, and therefore unable to trust him; and what wonder, then, that our love is faint, for who can love uncertainties?

If you are in some measure *thankful* for what you have received, and *hungering* and *thirsting* for more—you are in the frame I would wish for myself; and I desire to praise the Lord on your behalf. Pray for us. We join in love to you.

Three Letters to an Aged Friend

Letter 1

May 29, 1784

My dear madam,

We have heard that you have been sick, and I write in hopes of obtaining an answer, to inform me that you have experienced the help and power of the great Physician, and that you are now better. I know indeed before-hand, that, whether sick or well—you are just as you should be; and that what the Lord chooses for you—is always the best. But the gospel, though calculated to form us (rebellious as we are by nature) to a cheerful acquiescence in his will, and to regulate our sensibility—is not designed to suppress it. The same love which *rejoices* in the comforts of others, will likewise *sympathize* with them in affliction.

We are directed to *pray* for one another in this view, that, if it is the Lord's pleasure to prolong life and to restore health, our sense of the mercy may be heightened by the consideration that it is bestowed in answer to prayer. You do not properly need my prayers and wishes, you are safe in the hands of *infinite wisdom and love*; and, if you were in a wilderness remote from all society, you could not be sick or afflicted an hour longer than the Lord saw necessary to answer some gracious purpose in your favor. But this is his institution, that as members of the same body, we should maintain a fellowship and sympathy, helping together by prayer, that, so for the gift bestowed by means of many people, thanks may be given by many on our account.

It pleases me to think, that, though I am surrounded with noise, smoke, and dust here in London—that you my friend, enjoy the beautiful scenes of rural life. Oh, how I long sometimes to spend a day or two among woods, and lawns, and brooks, and hedge-rows, to hear the birds sing in the bushes, and to wander among the sheep and lambs, or to stand under the shadow of an old oak, upon a hill-top! Thus I lived when at Olney—how different is London! But, hush, Olney was the place once, but London is the place now. Hither the Lord brought me, and here he is pleased to support me, and in some measure, I trust, to own my ministry. I am satisfied. I hope I can make a good shift without your woods, and bushes, and pastures. What is the prospect from the finest hill in Essex, compared with the prospect I have from our London pulpit? What is the singing of birds, compared with the singing our hymn after sermon on a Sunday evening? What the bleating of lambs, compared with the lisping of inquiring souls, who are seeking after Jesus? Welcome noise, and dust, and smoke—just so that we may but be favored with his gracious presence in our hearts, houses, and ordinances. This will make all situations nearly alike, if we see the Lord's hand placing us in it, are enabled to do his will, and to set him before us, as our Lord and our Beloved.

You will please to present my good wishes to Mrs. B ____ , and likewise Miss D ____ , if she is with her. May He, in whose presence is life, whose loving-kindness is better than life, be with you all. Though we do not see each other, we are not far asunder. The throne of grace is a center, where thousands daily meet in spirit, and have real, though secret, communion with each other. They eat of one bread, walk by one rule; they have one Father and one home. There they will shortly meet, to part no more. They will shine, each one like the sun. They will form a glorious constellation, millions of suns shining together in their Lord's kingdom.

How pleased is Satan when he can prevail to set those at variance, who are in so many respects united! but, such is his subtlety, and such their weakness which he practices upon, that he has often prevailed thus—sometimes he shuts them up so close within the *paper walls* of a denomination, that they cannot see an inch beyond the bounds of their own party. Sometimes he holds his magical looking-glass before their eyes; and, when they thus view each other through the medium of *prejudice*, so that they look upon other true Christians with disgust! Here and there one escapes this general delusion—these wonder at the bustle around them, and endeavor to persuade the rest to peace and love as befits brethren, and perhaps are requited with the reproaches of both sides, as *neutrals*, *time-servers*, and *cowards*. But these *peace-makers* are blessed, approved of God, and beloved by all men who are in possession of their spiritual senses.

Through mercy, my dear madam, neither you nor I are to be scared by such words as *Methodist* or *Calvinist*. We see there is both *wheat* and *chaff* among all parties, and that they who love the Lord Jesus Christ, are a people scattered abroad at this time, as they were in the apostles' days, 1 Peter 1:1. We are much as usual. Accept our cordial love. Shall I beg you to pray for me and mine? I know you will.

Believe me to be, your affectionate and obliged.

Letter 2

November 27, 1784

My dear madam,

What shall I say to the news which Mr. C _____, (judging rightly of our affection for you,) was so kind as to bring me this morning? May I not say, without sinning, that I am sorry, very sorry? If I said

otherwise I would be a hypocrite. If my wife or I could have prevented it, you would not have fallen. Our gracious Lord who condescended to take our nature upon him, took it with all the feelings belonging to it which are not sinful. He was truly a man, and sympathized like a man with the afflictions of his friends. Instead of sharply rebuking Mary and Martha for their tears when their brother died, he kindly wept with them, though he had determined to raise him again from the dead. I allow myself, therefore, to be sorry for your fall and hurt, and to feel a solicitude until I hear further of you. Perhaps Mrs. B ____ may favor me with a line of information, if, as I apprehend, you may not be able to write yourself.

But now, to use the apostle's expression, "I have spoken to you as a man," let me look at you in another point of view. The Lord, who by his grace has enabled you to devote and entrust yourself to him, has engaged, by his promise, to take care of you, and to keep you in all your ways. Under his protection you have been safe a number of years—and did he fail you at last? Far from it! His eye was as directly upon you, his arm as certainly with you—when you fell, as at any other moment of your life! And you would no more have fallen, than the planets can fall from their orbits, without his permission and appointment. This event must work for your good, because he has promised that all things shall. If I could assign no other reason for those dispensations to his children, which, upon the first impression, are apt to startle us, this ought to be a sufficient reason, not only to silence, but to satisfy us—that it is the Lord. For, can *infinite wisdom* mistake? Or *infinite goodness* do anything that is unkind?

But I see other reasons why, in the present state of things, all things should appear as happening alike to all; and that his own people, who are freed from guilt and condemnation, and to whom he manifests himself as he does not unto the world, should not be

therefore exempted from a share in any of the *outward afflictions* to which sin has rendered mankind liable. I can see many inconveniences which would follow, if those who love the Lord were distinguished from the world around them, by a visible mark in their foreheads. But, if his providence universally preserved them from the calamities which others feel, so that it should be notorious and generally known that their persons were always safe, and that no true believer ever suffered by falls, fires, broken bones, and the like; such an exemption, in this calamitous state, would distinguish and point them out, almost as plainly as if they were surrounded with a glory, as the apostles are sometimes represented in popish pictures. Besides, how would it be known that the Lord whom they serve can make them cheerful and comfortable, under those trials and sufferings which the flesh naturally shrinks at—unless they were now and then put into such circumstances.

I trust, madam, you are of the same mind with a good woman I heard of about thirty years ago. She was very aged, and very poor. One day, in attempting to cross the street, a cart threw her down, and she broke her thigh-bone. She was taken into a house, and many people were soon about her, expressing their concern; but she said, "I thank you for your pity; but all is very well, and I hope I have not one bone in my body but is willing to be broken—if such is the Lord's will." What may be the outcome of this fall as to yourself, I know not. It is a greater thing to heal a broken heart—than a broken bone. So long as I hear that you are alive, I shall probably feel a wish that you may live a little longer. I shall therefore commend you to him to whom belong the issues from death, being assured that *you are immortal until the appointed number of your sufferings and services shall be completed!* But, if your fall should prove a means of hastening your removal to the church triumphant, then, however I and your many friends may regret our own loss, we ought to rejoice in your gain. As

this may possibly be the event, though I am willing to hope otherwise, I take a sort of leave of you, begging that, while you do remain on this side Jordan, you will pray for me and mine, that we may have grace to follow you while we live, and to follow you when we die—to that *heavenly home*, where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest. Oh, madam, what a prospect awaits you!

Oh, what has Jesus bought for me,
Before my ravished eyes;
Rivers of life divine I see,
And trees of paradise!

I see a world of spirits bright,
Who taste the pleasures there!
They all are robed in spotless white,
And conquering palms they bear!

Ah, that robe, that crown, those songs! Surely it is unspeakably better—to depart and to be with Jesus! If he calls you, I must and will consent to let you go; but I shall miss you. If he is pleased to raise you up, I shall rejoice to see you again. My wife joins me in best love to you.

I am, dear madam, your very affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 3

February 25, 1785

My dear madam,

I cannot think that you will continue a great while in this poor world, or that I can reasonably expect to see you again. The comfort is, that,

though Christian friendship be very pleasing, and Christian fellowship be very profitable when rightly managed—yet we are not necessary to each other. We are absolutely dependent upon the Lord—but not necessarily dependent upon any creatures. They smile upon us when he bids them, they do us good when he sends them—but they cannot benefit us without him. On the other hand, he can well supply their absence or inability, and do everything for us without them. Though I seldom saw you when you were in London—yet it gave me pleasure to think I might expect to see you now and then. When you are gone to heaven, this pleasure will fail—I shall see you no more here; I shall miss you; but in a little while I hope we shall meet again there.

But where is heaven? Is it at an immense distance beyond the fixed stars? Have our ideas of *space* anything to do with it? Is not heaven often upon earth in proportion as the presence of God is felt? Was not the apostle caught up there, though he knew not whether he was in the body or not, and consequently was not sure that he had changed his place? Is there not joy in heaven over one sinner that repents? Perhaps the redeemed of the Lord, as well as his angels, are nearer to us than we are aware. Perhaps they see us, though we see not them. Perhaps nothing but this veil of flesh and blood prevents us from seeing them likewise. However, on our part, the barrier is impenetrable! Oh, the wonders that will break in upon our mind, when death shall open this barrier to us!

What shall we then see? It is sufficient for us at present, to know that *we shall see Jesus!* We shall see him as he is—and we shall be like him! The circumstances of the heavenly state, if I may so speak, are hidden from us; but this, which constitutes the essence of it, we can form some faint apprehension of, from our present experience. All that deserves the name of *happiness* here, consists of such

conceptions of Jesus, and such measures of conformity to him, as are attainable while in a mortal and defiled nature. But we see him only as in a looking-glass, darkly and in part—but, when that which is *perfect* arrives, that which is in *part* shall be done away. We shall be all eye, all ear, all activity, in the communications of his love, and in the celebration of his praise.

Here on earth, we are almost upon a level with worms; there we shall rise to an equality with angels. In some respects our privilege will be superior to theirs. Angels cannot sing the song of the redeemed, nor claim so near a relation to Him who sits upon the throne. Are not these things worth dying for? I congratulate you, madam, you have almost finished your course; and he who has enabled you to keep the faith, and to fight the good fight, will shortly give you the conqueror's crown, prepared for you, and for all who love his appearing. They are many crowns, and yet one. The blessings of the other world are not like the wealth of this world, which is diminished in proportion to the numbers among whom it is divided. There each one shall possess the whole; as here we enjoy the light of the sun, though millions enjoy it with us, as fully as we could if there were none upon earth but ourselves to see it.

You will likewise soon be removed from all evil. You are going where pain, and sickness, and sorrow, and temptation and sin, have no place. Where your eyes and your heart will no longer be grieved with the wickedness of the world, where no one will ask you with a taunt, "What is your beloved more than another beloved?" In a word, where death shall be swallowed up in life, and where the miserable effects of our fall from God, shall be no more perceived, than we can perceive a stone that is sunk in the midst of the mighty ocean. I do not ask nor expect you to write an answer. I see you are too weak, to wish to impose such a task upon you. I only beg, that, while you stay

below, you will remember me and mine in prayer. My wife sends her affectionate remembrance with mine.

Believe me to be, your sincere friend, and obliged servant.

Eighteen letters to a pastor

Letter 1

November 27, 1767

My dear friend,

I congratulate you and your wife on your settlement in your new house, where I hope the Lord will dwell with and bless you both, and make you blessings to many.

Visits, etc. of *ceremony* are burdensome; yet something is due to civility; and, though we cannot have equal comfort in all our acquaintance, it is best to be on peaceful and neighborly terms. You need not have much of it—but so far as it cannot be prudently avoided, bear it as your cross. I would not wish to have you attempt to *force spiritual things too much upon those who do not like them*; or to expect them from those who have not experienced them. But, like a physician among sick people—watch opportunities of doing them good if possible.

You know not what the Lord has to do; some whom you now can hardly bear, may prove your comforts hereafter; and, if in the mean time they are disposed to be friendly—they have a right to a return in the same way.

I approve and rejoice in your faithfulness—but in some things, perhaps, you would do as well to keep your mind more to yourself; I mean in your free and unreserved manner of speaking of ministers, etc. Our Lord's direction to his disciples, in something of a similar case, was, "*Let them alone.*" So far as it is needful to withstand them, do so in the Lord's strength; but in mixed conversation, it is a good rule, to say nothing without a just call to the disadvantage of others. I must agree with Mr. B ____ , that such expressions as, drowsy Dissenters, are as well avoided in public prayer, being more likely to give offence than to do good. And I thought some few things you said to Mr. W ____ , might as well have been spared, considering the spirit of some of your hearers. I endeavor to bear a testimony against everything wrong—but alas! the best of us have cause for humiliation. My judgment of many people and things agrees with yours; but I have seen there is good sense in the old proverb, "Least said, soonest mended." We are sometimes mistaken in our own spirits, and though it befits us to be plain and open upon proper occasions, it is not our duty to be very busy in *disturbing a nest of hornets*. I was once in a large company where very severe things were spoken of Mr. W ____ , when one person seasonably observed, *that though the Lord was pleased to effect conversion and edification by a variety of means, he had never known anybody convinced of error—by what was said of him behind his back!* This was about thirteen years ago, and it has been on my mind as a useful hint ever since!

Believe me to be affectionately yours.

Letter 2

July 15, 1768

My dear friend,

I was glad to hear that you and your wife were again safely restored to each other, and that the Lord had freed you from your illness. No doubt it was far from pleasing to be so straitened. But to be made, in a measure, submissive to the Lord's will, to appear to a disadvantage at those times and places when, perhaps, we should particularly desire to do our best; I say, to be content to appear weak and poor, from a real sense of our weakness and poverty in his sight; to see his wisdom and love in appointing us such humbling dispensations, and to submit to them—is a nobler attainment than to be able to speak with the tongue of an angel!

The Lord, who opened the mouth of Balaam's donkey, could, if he had pleased, have enabled it to have preached a sermon an hour long, and with as much method and accuracy as the most learned in academies or universities. *Speaking* is but a gift, and if he is pleased sometimes to open our mouths freely, we know not but a wicked man might equal or exceed us. But *grace* is the peculiar blessing which he bestows upon his dear children—and upon them only. Your streams may sometimes run low—but only when he sees it as both good and necessary; at other times you shall be as if you were taking water from Ezekiel's river. However, rejoice in this—that the *fountain* is yours, and nothing can cut you off from it!

I am affectionately yours.

Letter 3

September 30, 1768

My dear friend,

This has been a sort of busy week; but seldom have I felt more unfit to teach others, or more unfit to preach to my own heart. Oh, these outside services are wearisome things, when the Lord leaves us to

feel our own hardness and emptiness! But I should learn to glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. As to myself, though cause enough to be *humbled*, I have no cause to be cast down, since my righteousness is in heaven. And as to my ministry, I ought to desire that it may appear, that the excellency of the power is of God, and that there is nothing in me but weakness.

Dust and ashes is my name,
My all is sin and misery!

So we say, so we believe—and yet we would gladly go forth as if we were wise and good. The Lord help us to discover *SELF* in all its various windings, to resist it by the sword of the Spirit, as we would the devil, for surely—self is his great engine of evil. It would be a fine thing to have the united knowledge of Paul and the eloquence of Apollos—so that we might be the tip-top characters in the foolish dispute among professors, "*Who is the best preacher?*" But I can tell you a finer thing, and more within our reach, because it is what the Lord invites even the lowest of the flock to seek for; I mean, the character to which the promise is made, "For the High and Exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy says this: "I live in a high and holy place, and with the contrite and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite!" Isaiah 57:15. Let the discourses of others be admired for ingenuity, learning, or pathos—but may we be ambitious that ours may savor of a *broken and contrite spirit*; then shall we be best able to commend a precious Savior, and then we may warrantably hope the Lord will not allow us to speak in vain.

I am affectionately yours in the best bonds.

Letter 4

February 17, 1769

Dear sir,

I cannot agree with your friends, or with Witsius, respecting the *degrees in glory*. Perhaps we are not capable of stating the question properly in this dark world. I see no force in the argument drawn from 1 Corinthians 15:40-41; or rather, that does not appear to me the sense of the passage, or that the apostle had any respect to *degrees of glory*. The text in Matthew 19:28, may be compared with Revelation 3:21. However, admitting such degrees, perhaps they will not be distributed (according to human expectation) to such as have been most employed in active life, Matthew 10:41. As wickedness is rated by the judgment of God, not according to the number of outward acts—but by what the heart would do had opportunity offered, Matthew 5:28; so the Lord will graciously accept the *desires* of his people, and they shall in no wise lose their reward, because his providence has appointed them a narrower sphere.

One man like Mr. Whitfield is raised up to preach the gospel with success through a considerable part of the earth; another is called to the humbler service of sweeping the streets, or cleaning this 'great minister's' shoes. Now if the latter is thankful and content in his poor station, if he can look without envy, yes, with much love on the man that is honored; if he can rejoice in the good that is done, or pray for the success of those whom the Lord sends—I see not why he may not be as great a man in the sight of God, as he who is followed and admired by thousands!

Upon a supposition of *degrees of glory*, I would think it probable, the best Christian will have the highest place, and I am inclined to think, that if you and I were to travel *in search of the best Christian in the land*, or were qualified to distinguish who deserved the title, it

is more than two to one we would not find the person in a *pulpit*, or any public Christian ministry; perhaps some old woman at her wheel; or some bed-ridden person, hidden from the knowledge of the world, in a mud-walled cottage, would strike our attention more than any of the 'doctors' or 'reverends' with whom we are acquainted. Let us not measure men, much less ourselves, by *gifts* or *services*. One grain of *grace* is worth abundance of *gifts*. To be self-abased; to be filled with a spirit of love, and peace, and gentleness; to be dead to the world; to have the heart deeply affected with a sense of the glory and grace of Jesus; to have our will bowed to the will of God; these are the great things, more valuable, if compared in the balance of the sanctuary, than to be an instrument of converting a province, or a nation! See 1 Cor. 13:1-3.

In a word, I would think, from Luke 7:47, that those who love most—will be most happy; that those who have most forgiven—will love most. And as, in the present life, every believer thinks himself a peculiar instance of God's mercy, and sees his sins in a peculiar light of aggravation, I apprehend it to be so hereafter. The sin of *nature* is equal in all; and so I think would *actual* sin be likewise—but the *differences are made by the restraining grace and providence of God*. He is not perhaps, in the sight of God, the greatest sinner, who has committed the most notorious acts of sin in the sight of man. We would not judge one *wolf* to be fiercer than another, because he had opportunity of devouring more sheep. Any other wolf would have done the same, in the same circumstances. So in sin. So (think I) in grace. The Lord's people, every one of them, would be glad to do him as much service, and to yield him as much honor, as any of the best have attained to. But he divides severally to one, 60; to one, 30; to one, 100—as he pleases; but they are all accepted in the same righteousness; equally united to Jesus; and, as to the good works on which a supposed difference is afterwards to be founded, I

apprehend those that have most—will gladly do by them as Paul did by his legal righteousness, count them loss and dung for the excellency of Christ Jesus the Lord! Matthew 25:37.

But it may be said, Is then nothing to be expected for so many trials and sufferings, as some ministers are called to for the sake of the gospel? In my judgment, he who does not find a reward in being enlivened, supported and enabled by the Holy Spirit in the work of the gospel; who does not think, that, to have multiplied labors owned to the conversion even of a few souls—is a great reward; who does not account the ministry of the gospel, with grace to be faithful in the discharge of it, a reward and honor in itself sufficient to over-balance all the difficulties it may expose him to; whoever, I say, does not thus think of the service of Jesus—has some reason to question his right to the lowest degree of glory, or, at least, has little right to look for eminence in glory, even though he should preach with as much power and acceptance, and in the midst of as many hardships, as Paul did.

You will hardly think by my letter that I am straitened for time at present—yet this indeed is the case; but I have dropped into a gossip with you insensibly. I am glad the Lord has visited you and *comforted* you of late. Think it not strange, if such seasons are followed by *temptations* and *darkness*. Paul was in danger of being exalted above measure; and you know the means the Lord employed to preserve him. You are no better than he; and need not desire to be more graciously dealt with. His grace shall be sufficient for you. As to everything else, submit yourself to him.

Letter 5

July 7, 1770

My dear friend,

I received your piteous, doleful letter. I hope it is needless now to attempt to comfort you, and that this letter will find Satan cast out, and *the man* restored to his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus. I pity you that you have so many conflicts; yet I rejoice with you, because I know the Lord intends you good by these *tossings*, and will thereby keep you humble and dependent. Is it not better to be *sifted* and *shaken*—than to be left to fall in such snares as some have been taken in, whom you have accounted better than yourself? But why are you so ready to throw down your shield, and to talk of running away from the battle? He who harasses you while you hold the *gospel plough*, would be presently with you if you were ploughing in the field! Nor can any change of circumstance put you out of his reach, unless you could tell how to run away from *yourself*.

It is said, "You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn." I am sure the Lord has not muzzled you—how is it then, that while you set forth a free salvation to others, you do not feed upon it yourself; but contradict your own preaching, and reason and complain, as though you had found out that the blood of Jesus Christ cannot cleanse from all sin; or, as though the Lord were as changeable as you are? I know you are a staunch Calvinist in your judgment—but I would think you an Arminian, by some of your complaints!

When the enemy would tempt you to murmur about a provision, tell him that he knows, (for he walks to and fro the earth,) that, taking the kingdom around, there is not one minister of the gospel in ten, so well provided for as you. And if so, you may ask him, if you have not much more cause for *thankfulness* than *murmuring*. What you have, the Lord has given you; and if he sees that is too little—he will give you such and such things—2 Samuel 12:8. But then it must be in *his* way and time, and not in *your* own. *How can you teach others to live*

a life of faith, except you learn, by daily experience, to live it yourself? And the life of faith is maintained, not by bags and coffers—but by pleading the promises in prayer, when we have nothing else to look to.

As to the *success* of your ministry, it is no part of your concern, further than to make it matter of prayer. *Faithfulness* and *diligence* is our part; the success of it, is the Lord's part. I suppose you are quite as acceptable in your city, as Jeremiah was in Jerusalem; and probably see more to encourage you in your hearers, than he did in his. He was not very popular—but he was plain and honest; and if not owned to save the souls of others, he delivered his own. And, after all, the Lord did just as much by him, as he purposed before he called him; and he did not a tittle more than he had purposed before-hand, by the preaching of Paul.

But it seems, you think other people preach better than you. I hope you will always think so. If you should be mistaken, it is a fault on the right side. But other people think so too. I am not so sure of that; but if they do, it is perhaps to chastise you for your unbelieving fears. If you have a mind to outdo yourself, and to outdo us all, I will give you a receipt—*Believe!* The more you believe—the better you will preach. If the ministers they commend are faithful, simple preachers of the truth, depend upon it, the more your people like them, the more they will like you. I believe you are as free from a fear of being outshone by others, as most men are; but there is some of this leaven in all of our hearts—let us watch and pray against it, and heartily wish and pray, that all who preach Jesus, may do it with more power and success—than we can ourselves! We shall not be the poorer—for their riches; but our Lord and theirs will take it well of us; and if he sees us simply content to take the lowest place, he will raise us up higher; for

it is a standing law in his kingdom, that he who *humbles* himself shall be *exalted*.

I have touched on all your complaints, and brought myself to the end of my paper. Notwithstanding what I have written, I could fill a sheet with sorrowful stories in my turn; but, "The Lord is good."

I am affectionately yours.

Letter 6

My dear friend,

I might defer answering your last letter until I see you; yet, because I love you, I will write. I apprehend your mind is darkened with temptation, for your views of the gospel, when you preach, are certainly clearer than your letter expresses. You may think you distinguish between evidences and conditions—but the heart is deceitful, and often beguiles our judgment when we are judging concerning ourselves.

You say, "I hope it is my desire to cast myself upon the free promise in Jesus Christ; but this alone does not give assurance of my personal interest in his blood." I ask, Why not? Because you lean to conditions, and do not think yourself good enough. It appears to me, that if I cast myself upon his promise, and if his promise is true, I must undoubtedly be interested in his full redemption; for he has said, "Him that comes to me—I will *never* cast out." If you can find a case or circumstance which the words 'never' will not include—then you may despond.

It is certainly a delusion to imagine oneself of the number of elect, without scriptural evidence. But have you not that evidence? I think,

as the saying is, *you cannot see the forest, for the trees*. You tell me what evidences you lack namely, spiritual experiences, inward holiness, earnest endeavors. All this I may allow in a right sense; but, in judging on these grounds, it is common and easy in a *dark hour*—to turn the gospel into a covenant of works.

But take it your own way—If a fear of being deceived, a mourning under a sense of vileness, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, a sense of the evil and danger of sin, a persuasion of the preciousness and suitableness of Christ in his offices, etc.; if these are not spiritual experiences, I know not what are! And will you dare deny, that God has given you these? As to inward holiness, when we meet, you shall define, if you please, what you mean by it.

The holiness of a sinner seems principally to consist in self-abasement, and in admiring views of Jesus as a complete Savior—these are the main principles from whence every gracious fruit is derived. In proportion as we have these—we shall be humble, meek, patient, weaned from the world, and devoted to God. But, if you will look for a holiness, that shall leave no room for the workings of corruption and temptation; you look for what God has nowhere promised, and for what is utterly inconsistent with our present state. If you say, you must doubtless expect to feel evil in your heart—but that you are discouraged by feeling *so much evil*; I ask further, If you can find from the Word of God, how much evil a holy person may feel? For my own part, I believe the *most holy* people feel the *most evil*. Indeed, when faith is strong and in exercise, sin will not much break out to the observation of others; but it cuts them out work enough within.

Indeed, my friend, you will not be steadily comfortable, until you learn to derive your comforts from a simple apprehension of the

person, work, and offices of Christ. He is made unto us of God—not only *righteousness*, but *sanctification* also. One direct appropriating act of *faith* in him, will strengthen you more than all the *earnest endeavors* you speak of. Evidences, as you call them, are of use in their place; but the best evidence of faith—is the shutting our eyes equally upon both our *defects* and our *graces*, and looking directly to Jesus as clothed with authority and power to save to the very utmost. So you preach to others—so you deal with exercised consciences; why not preach so to yourself? Will you point out a ground for *their* hopes, upon which you are afraid to venture *your* own hope? Has he not kept you sound in the faith in wavering times? Does he not preserve you unspotted from the world? Does he not enable and own you in your ministry? Has he not often refreshed you with his consolations? Do you not tell others, that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin? Why then do *you* give way to doubts and fears?

I would have you humbled before the Lord for your unworthiness. In this I wish I was more like you; but rejoice in Christ Jesus, and resist every temptation to doubt your interest in his love, as you would resist a temptation to adultery or murder. Plead the apostle's argument, Romans 8:31-38, before the Lord and against Satan, and do not dishonor Christ so as to imagine he will disappoint the desire—which no power but his could implant in your heart!

Your's in the best bonds, etc.

Letter 7

My dear friend,

I shall be glad to hear that you and your wife are in good health, and that your souls prosper. Mine was dull and languid when I was with you, and has been too much so ever since. But I trust the Lord, the

good Shepherd, will lead me safely through this wilderness, and bring me at last to see him in his kingdom. I am weary of living at such a distance from God—yet cannot quicken myself. Pray for me and mine, that we may be favored with a season of refreshment. I have everything else I need; but the lack of more lively and abiding communion with him, makes my chariot wheels drive move heavily.

To him I owe my wealth and friends,
And health and safe abode;
Thanks to his name for meaner things,
But these are not my God.

I find VANITY engraved in capital letters, on myself and everything around me. And, while encompassed with mercies, and so thoroughly satisfied with my outward condition, that I could hardly wish a single circumstance altered, I feel emptiness, and groan being burdened. If you think, by my writing in this strain, that I am very spiritual, you will be greatly mistaken. But I can say—I wish to be so.

My *preaching* seems contrary to my *experience*—in some respects. The two points on which I most largely insist, are, the glories of the Redeemer, and the happiness of a life of communion with God. I can often find something to say on these subjects in the pulpit; but, at some other times, my thoughts of Jesus are so low, disjointed, and interrupted, that it seems as if I knew nothing of him—but by the hearing of the ear! And answerable to this, is the *sensible communion* I have with him. Alas! how faint, how infrequent! I approach the *throne of grace*, encumbered with a thousand distractions of thought, each of which seems to engage more of my attention—than the business I have in hand.

To complete the riddle, I would add, that, notwithstanding all these complaints, which seem great enough to forbid my hope, to plunge

me in despair—I have peace at bottom. I see, I know, I cannot deny, that he is all-sufficient; that he can, and does pity and help me, unworthy as I am; and though I seldom enjoy a glimpse of sunshine—yet I am not wholly in the dark. My heart is vile, and even my prayers are sin; I wish I could mourn more—but the Lord forbid I should sorrow as those that have no hope. He is able to save to the uttermost. *His blood speaks louder than all my evils.* My soul is very sick—but my Physician is infallible. He never turns out any as *incurable*, of whom he has once taken the charge. That would be equally to the dishonor of his *skill* and his *compassion*. Had he been willing that I should perish, he would not have wrought a miracle (for I account it no less) to save me from sinking into the great deep, when he first put it in my heart, to cry to him for mercy. And, oh, what astonishing goodness has followed me from that day to this! Help me to praise him; and may he help you to proclaim the glory of his salvation, and to rejoice in it yourself.

I am affectionately yours.

Letter 8

December 6, 1772

Dear sir,

I long for you to learn to distinguish between what are properly the effects of a nature miserably depraved, and which shows itself in the heart of every child of God—and the effects of Satan's immediate temptations. What you complain of, are fiery darts—but you cannot be properly said to shoot them at yourself; they come from an enemy, and the *shield of faith* is given to you—that you may quench them. Why then, are you so ready to throw it away?

You seem to think yourself *better at one time than at another*. I believe that we, as in and of ourselves, are *always alike*. Look at the sea; sometimes it rages and tosses its waves, at another time it is calm and smooth. But the nature of the sea is not changed; it is not grown more gentle in itself than it was before; wait but until the next storm, and you will see it rage again as much as ever. Our unrenewed part is as untamable as the sea. When temptations are at a distance, or the Lord is present, it may lie quiet—but it is always deceitful and desperately wicked. Or like a lion, which may be sometimes awake, sometimes asleep; but whether asleep or awake, it is a lion still, and a little matter will rouse it from its slumber, and set it roaring; though, while sleeping, it may seem as harmless as a kitten!

If we could muse less upon *ourselves*, and meditate more upon the *Lord Jesus*—we would do better. He likewise, is always the same—as near and as gracious in the *storm*—as in the *calm*. Yes, he expresses a peculiar care of those who are tempted, tossed, and not comforted. Though you are sore thrust at that you may fall—He will be your refuge. But I wish you could more readily rest upon his Word, and rejoice in his righteousness, even in that only.

Believe me to be, sincerely and affectionately yours.

Letter 9

October 22, 1773

My dear friend,

If the lives of *the two Henry's*, and of other good men, were written by inspired men, you would not be so much discouraged at reading them. Depend upon it, they saw as much reason to be ashamed of themselves as we do. To us they appear in their best clothes, and we are told more of what the Lord wrought for them, than of the effects

of indwelling sin under which they groaned. If I should outlive you, and should have a call to write your biography—I would perhaps find more to say in your favor than you are aware of; and if you would have the darker side known, as well as the brighter—you must write it yourself.

I am glad Mr. ____ preached among you. There are some points on which we must exercise mutual forbearance. I have heard him speak sometimes as if he considered *assurance* to pertain to the *essence of faith*. Yet I do not think he would willingly discourage a weak believer. He is a frank honest man, and I am persuaded would not have been offended, if you had hinted to him in conversation anything in which you seemed to differ; and perhaps, were he to explain himself, the difference would not appear to be great.

I hope you and your wife are well reconciled to the death of your child. Indeed, I cannot be sorry for the *death of infants*. How many storms do they escape! I think, in my *private* judgment, that they are included in the election of grace. Perhaps those who die in infancy, are the exceeding great multitude of all people, nations, and languages mentioned, Revelation 7:9, in distinction from the visible body of professing believers, who were marked in their foreheads, and openly known to be the Lord's. But I check myself, and would not indulge opinions about points not clearly and certainly revealed.

I am sincerely, your affectionate friend and brother.

Letter 10

June 24, 1774

My dear friend,

I returned home in safety, under that invisible and gracious

protection to which we are always equally indebted, whether at home or abroad, and which had preserved all in peace during my absence. Many, undoubtedly, who left their houses on the day I went to _____, will never return to them again alive. And probably many who left their families in peace, have found, or will find when they come back, that some unexpected calamity has quite prevented the pleasure they proposed in seeing their habitation again. To live as I have long done, from year to year, exempted from the distresses with which the world is filled; to see so many falling and suffering around—yet I and mine preserved; sickness and death marching all around us, and filling almost every house with groans—and yet not permitted to knock at our door—this is a mercy for which I am not sufficiently thankful!

Indeed, *ingratitude* and *insensibility* towards the Lord, are evils which I may abhor myself for; and did I act in the like unfeeling, stupid spirit towards my fellow-creatures, they would soon be weary of me! But he is God—and not man. I often call upon my heart, and charge it not to forget his benefits; but there is so much *stone* and *lead* in its composition, that I can make little impression upon it. *Melt it, O Lord, with the fire of your love!*

Though I was very glad to see you and our friends at your house, I was not pleased with myself when there. Particularly, I was sorry I gave way to the discourse about baptism, which, as we all seemed well persuaded in our own minds, was little better than *idle talk*. When tea was almost over, it occurred to me, how easily I might have turned it to a more profitable subject—but then it was too late. Methinks it did not require much study to find out that we were but poorly employed. Perhaps I may be wiser hereafter; but one word draws on another so strangely, that we are liable to be entangled before we are aware, for *Mr. Self* loves to speak last.

I thought of you yesterday. I hope you had a pleasant visit. I would have been glad to have been with you; I love that house. There seems to be no leisure in it to talk about *people* or *opinions*. The inquiry there is concerning Jesus—how to *love* him more, and *serve* him better; how to *derive* from him, and *render* to him. If this is to be a Moravian, I do not wonder they are reproached and scorned. Where the spirit of the gospel is, there the *cross* will be. But, as I am acquainted only with two families, I cannot say how it is with the rest; but why should I not hope they are all in the same way? If they have, notwithstanding, some little peculiarities, I apprehend that very few of those societies which are ready to censure them, can exceed them in the real fruits of the Spirit.

I am yours sincerely affectionate.

Letter 11

September, 1774

My dear friend,

Your judgment in the *gospel* is sound; but there is a *legal something* in your experience, which perplexes you. You are capable of advising others; I wish you could *apply* more effectually what you *preach*—to yourself, and distinguish in your own case, between a cause of humiliation—and a reason of distress. You cannot be too *sensible* of the inward and inbred evils you complain of; but you may be, yes, you are, *improperly affected* by them. You say, you find it hard to believe that it is compatible with the divine purity—to embrace or employ such a monster as yourself. You express not only a low opinion of yourself, which is right—but too low an opinion of the person, work, and promises of the Redeemer; which is certainly wrong. And it seems too, that, though the total, absolute depravity of

human nature is a fundamental article in your creed, you do not experimentally take up that doctrine, in the length, and breadth, and depth of it—as it lies in the Word of God. Or else, why are you continually disappointed and surprised that in yourself, you find nothing but evil? A man with two broken legs will hardly wonder that he is not able to run, or even to stand. Your complaints seem to go upon the supposition, that, though you have nothing good of your own—you ought to have; and most certainly you ought if you were under the law; but the *gospel* is provided for the *helpless* and the *worthless*.

You do not wonder that it is cold in winter, or dark at midnight. All depends upon the sun; just so the exercise of grace depends upon the Sun of Righteousness. When he withdraws, we find ourselves very bad indeed—but no worse in ourselves than the Scriptures declare us to be. If, indeed, the divine rectitude and purity accepts and employs you, it is not for *your own sake*, nor could it be, even if were you ten thousand times better than you are. You have not, you cannot have, anything in the sight of God—but what you derive from the righteousness and atonement of Jesus. If you could keep *Jesus* more constantly in view—you would be more comfortable. He would be more honored.

Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. He sometimes offers to teach us humility; but though I wish to be humble, I desire not to learn in his school. His premises perhaps are true—that we are vile, wretched creatures—but he then draws abominable conclusions from them; and would teach us—that, therefore, we ought to question either the power, or the willingness, or the faithfulness of Christ. Indeed, though our complaints are good, so far as they spring from a dislike of sin; yet, when we come to examine them closely, there is often so much self-will, self-righteousness, unbelief, pride, and

impatience mingled with them—that they are little better than the worst evils we can complain of!

We join in love to you both. Let us pray that we may be enabled to follow the apostle's, or rather the Lord's command by him, 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!' We have little to rejoice in *ourselves*—but we have right and reason to rejoice in *him*.

I am, for his sake, sincerely yours.

Letter 12

February 11, 1777

My dear friend,

The words, "for them," Isaiah 35:1, had better have been omitted, for they have no business with the text, and only perplex the sense. This is the judgment of the best commentators. But, if retained, the best meaning is, that, when the power of Edom is destroyed, the places which before were desolate and barren, shall rejoice over them; to the destruction of the one, the glory of the other shall succeed.

The whole chapter is chiefly a pastoral description of the blessed change which the gospel shall effect; as if a dry wilderness shall be changed into a well watered and fruitful country. There is no need to seek a particular and express meaning of the words, "reeds and rushes;" they only enliven the description and contrast. Dry sandy deserts, as in Africa, are the haunt or habitation of serpents or dragons. But such an alteration shall ensue, that, instead of dry places, there shall be rivers and pools; water not merely to refresh the grass—but in great abundance, as in these places where reeds and rushes usually grow. What is often said of *parables*—That they do not go on all-fours, is true of many *prophetical* descriptions; there

are circumstances which heighten the beauty of the painting; but, if we attempt to deduce doctrines from every such circumstance, we rather *enervate* the spirit of the passage, than *explain* it.

It must be allowed, likewise, that our translation, though in the main excellent and faithful, often misses the beauty and clearness of the original, owing sometimes to a servile dependence on the Masorite pointing, and sometimes to the translators not attending to the genius of the Hebrew poetical language, which is considerably different from the prose. "In the habitation of dragons, where *each* lay;" the word *each* makes the passage bald. "In the places where dragons lay (or lurked) shall be grass," etc. In the eighth verse likewise, instead of, "but it shall be for those," the original points out a glorious thought, which is quite lost in the version, because it follows an improper division of the verse. Lowth's later version, which, when read, seems to speak for itself, is to this purpose—"The unclean shall not pass over it; but He shall walk with them in it, and the fool (or the weak) shall not err therein." This is the reason why no lion or unclean shall be there, and why the weakest of his people shall not be destroyed or wander—because He (their God and Savior, Isaiah 35:4,) shall walk with them, and be their Guard and Guide.

However, in public preaching, I meddle as little and as gently as possible with these differences. I sometimes intimate, that the words will bear another sense; but I would be unwilling to make plain people suspect their Bibles are not right. But there are innumerable places in the prophets which are capable of a much clearer translation than what they have at present. Let me add one more, Isaiah 62:5. Instead of, "So shall your sons marry you," it should undoubtedly be, "So shall your Maker (or Creator) marry you," agreeably to the following part of the verse.

Believe me to be affectionately yours.

Letter 13

March 11, 1772

My dear friend,

I hope your wife's cold is better, and the children's illnesses are on the mending hand. How many careful hours by day, and sleepless hours by night, have I escaped by not being a parent! It is well when they that have children, and they that have none—are alike pleased with the Lord's appointment.

I fear we are not yet come to the national crisis. But I know not the Lord's secret will. That I am sure will take place. As to outward appearances, and the purposes of men, pro and con, I pay little regard to them. Indeed, they are no more stable than the clouds in a storm, which vary their shape every moment. *It is enough for us that the Lord reigns, is carrying on his own cause, and will take care of his own people.* The best, the only way in which we can serve the public, is by *praying* for it, and *mourning* for those sins which have given rise to these calamities.

Alas! what does *one day of humiliation* in a year signify? When the day is over, everything goes on just as it did before. The *busy* world, the *mirthful* world, and the *religious* world, are, I suppose, much the same since the fast day—as they were before it—buying and selling, eating and drinking, dancing and playing; and the *professing sheep* biting and tearing each other like wolves; or else like *decoy-ducks*, enticing one another into the world's snares. And, though I find fault with others, I have enough to look upon at home. May the Lord pardon them—and me also! My heart is deceitful and wicked; my services poor and polluted; my sins very many, and greatly

aggravated; so that I should be one of the last to be censorious! And yet I cannot help seeing that the profession of many is cold—where it should be warm; and only warm in *animosity* and *contention*. May the Lord help us; for we are in a woeful case as a people.

I am sincerely yours.

Letter 14

September 4, 1778

My dear friend,

I hope you were the instrument of much good abroad, and brought home much comfort and peace in your own heart. How many are the seen and the unseen mercies we are favored with in a long journey! And what mercy to your wife and your family well on their return, as I hope you did!

The same good providence which has preserved you and yours, has taken care of me and mine. But my wife has been ill for some time; yet no oftener and no more than we have been able to bear, or than the Lord saw was most for our advantage. After so many years' experience of his goodness, we surely have reason to be convinced that he does all things well. At present, she is tolerably well.

We are his sheep—and he is our Shepherd. If a sheep had *reason*, and were sensible of its own state, how weak to withstand the wolf, how prone in itself to wander, how utterly unable to provide for its own subsistence; it could have no comfort, unless it knew that it was under the care of a shepherd; and, in proportion to the opinion it formed of the shepherd's watchfulness and sufficiency, such would be its confidence and peace. But if you could suppose the sheep had *depravity* likewise, then it would act as we often do; its reason would

degenerate into vain reasoning, it would distrust the shepherd, and find fault with his management! It would burden itself with contrivances and cares; tremble under the thoughts of a hard winter, and never be easy unless it was surrounded with hay-stacks. It would study from morning until night where to hide itself out of the wolf's way. Poor, wise, silly sheep! if you had not a shepherd, all your schemes would be fruitless; when you had broken your heart with care, you are still as unable to preserve yourself as you were before—and if you have a good shepherd, they are all needless. Is it not sufficient that he cares for you?

Thus I could preach to such a sheep as I have supposed; and thus I try to preach to my own heart. But though I know I cannot, by any study of mine, add an inch to my stature—I am prone to puzzle myself about twenty things, which are equally out of my power, and equally unnecessary—if the Lord is my Shepherd.

Letter 15

November 4, 1778

My dear friend,

Mr. ____ told me on Saturday, that when he left, you and two of your children were ill of the infected sore throat; the next day he sent me word that you were better—but unable to preach. I have not had an opportunity of writing since; but you have been often on my mind. I hope you will be able to inform me soon, that the Lord has caused his *rainbow* to appear in this *dark cloud*, and that you and your wife found him to be a present help in time of trouble. The disorder, I know, is very alarming, and the event fatal in many instances. It would have been no less so to you, if it had received commission to remove you by a quick passage out of the reach of sin and sorrow.

But I hope your work is not yet done; and, if not, I know the most dangerous disease cannot affect your life. Until the Lord's purposes by us and concerning us, are fulfilled—we are in perfect safety, though on a field of battle, or surrounded by the pestilence.

I trust you will be spared a while longer to your family, friends, and people. Upon the same grounds, if either of your children should die—I shall not so directly ascribe it to the illness, as to the will of God; for, if, upon the whole, it be the most for his glory, and best for you—they likewise shall recover. Should he appoint otherwise, it must be best, because *he* does it! And a glance of the light of his countenance, the influence of that grace which he has promised shall be afforded according to our day, will enable you to resign them. I do not say it will cost you no pain; but in defiance of the feelings of flesh and blood, you will, I trust, hold nothing so dear that you have received from him—as to be unwilling to return it into his hands when he is pleased to call for it. He will help you to remember, that you owe him all; that your children are not properly *your own*. He *lent* them, and every creature-comfort that you enjoy—and he has a right to reclaim them.

We do not like to have anything forced from us which is our own; but it would be dishonest in us to want to keep what we have only borrowed, if the rightful owner demands it. Further, the Lord is not only *sovereign*—but infinitely *wise* and *good*; and therefore it is our interest, as well as our duty, to acquiesce in his appointments. Should you be called to the trial, I wish you the same supports and the same submission as Mr. ____ had when he recently parted with his little one; and as you have the same God, and the same promises, I hope you will. Thus much upon a supposition that this should find you under God's rod. But I shall be glad to hear that the merciful

Lord has healed both you and them, and that you are now feeling the meaning of Psalm 103:1-5.

My wife has been favored with a comfortable share of health since she was at Bedford; a little indisposed now and then—but slightly, and soon better. The many attacks she has had the last two years, have rendered such considerations as I have shared with you, familiar to my thoughts; sometimes I have felt the force of them, sometimes they all seem to fail me. For I can do nothing—or I can do all things; just as the Lord is—or is not, present with me. In my judgment, however, I am satisfied that I have at all times great cause for thankfulness, and at no time any just reason to complain, for I am a sinner.

Believe me to be, your very affectionate friend and servant.

Letter 16

November 18, 1778

Dear sir,

I have observed, that most of the advantages which Satan is recorded to have gained against the Lord's servants have been after great and signal deliverances and favors; as in the cases of Noah, Lot, David, and Hezekiah. And I have found it so repeatedly in my own experience. How often, if my history were written by an inspired pen, might this proof of the depravity of my heart be inserted; "But John Newton did not render unto the Lord, according to all the benefits he received; for his heart was lifted up in pride." May it be far otherwise with you. May you come out of the furnace refined; and may it appear to yourself and all around you, that the Lord has done you good by your afflictions.

Thus vile are our natures—to be capable of making the Lord such perverse returns for his great mercies—as we often do! How would we blush if our earthly friends and benefactors could bring such charges of ingratitude against us, as God justly might. No; they could not bear a thousandth part; the dearest and kindest of them would have been weary of us, and cast us off long ago, had we behaved so towards them. We may well say, *Who is a God like unto You, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of his people?* It seems that the prophet selects the Lord's patience towards his own people, as the most astonishing of all his perfections, and that which eminently distinguishes him from all other beings.

And indeed, the sins of believers are attended with aggravations peculiar to themselves. The inhabitants of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* were great sinners—but they did not sin against light, and love, and experience. *Pharaoh* was proud—but he had not been humbled at the foot of the cross. *Ahab* killed Naboth for his vineyard—but not altogether so basely as David killed Uriah for his wife. I see many profligate sinners around me—but the Lord has not blessed them with mercies, instructions, and pardons, as he has followed me. My outward life, through mercy, is not like their's; but, if the secrets of my heart were laid open—no one would not think me much better than the worst of them! Especially at some times and seasons, since I first tasted that he was gracious. And yet he has borne with me, and is pleased to say, *that He will never leave me nor forsake me.*

Well, when we have said all we can of the abounding of sin in us—grace still *more* abounds in Jesus. We cannot be so evil—as he is good. His power is a good match for our weakness. His riches are a good match for our poverty. His mercy is a good match for our misery. We are vile in ourselves—but we are complete in him. In

ourselves we have cause to be abased—but in him we may rejoice.
Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!

I am sincerely yours.

Letter 17

December 29, 1780

My dear friend,

I hope when this letter arrives, it will find you and yours comfortable, and your heart and mouth full of gratitude to him who crowns the year with his goodness. Well, these passing years each bear away a large portion of our remaining time—and the *last year* cannot be far off. Oh, that precious name—which can enable a sinner to think of his last year and his last hour without dismay! What do we owe to him who has disarmed death of its sting and horrors, and shown us the land of light and immortality beyond the grave!

May he be with us in the new year. Yes, he has promised he will, even unto death. Therefore, though we know not what a day may bring forth, we need fear no evil; for he knows all, and will provide accordingly, Oh, what a relief it is—to be enabled to cast every care and burden upon him who cares for us! Though the night should be dark, the storm loud, and the billows high—the infallible Pilot will steer our barks safely through.

This has been an important year with me, it has introduced me into an entire new scene of service; and it has likewise seemed a very short year. Oh, how the weeks have whirled round! It has not been without its *trials*; but *comforts* have much more abounded. With respect to my public work, I have been much favored with liberty, peace, and acceptance. I hope it has not been wholly a lost year;

though, with respect to my part and share of it, I have reason to say, '*Enter not into judgment with your servant!*'

Let us help each other with your prayers, that the *little uncertain remainder of life* may be filled up to the praise of our dear Lord; that we may be united to his will, conformed to his image, and devoted to his service. Thus we shall show forth his praise; that we aim to walk as he walked, and, by a sweet constraining sense of his love—are formed into an habitual imitation of his spirit and temper, in meekness, integrity, benevolence towards men; in humility, dependence, resignation, confidence, and gratitude towards him.

I pity such *wise-headed Calvinists* as you speak of. I am afraid there are no people more fully answer the character, and live in the spirit of the Pharisees of old, than some professed *loud sticklers for free grace*. They are wise in their own eyes; their *notions*, which the pride of their hearts tells them are so bright and clear, serve them for a righteousness, and they trust in themselves, and despise others. One modest, inquiring Arminian is worth a thousand such Calvinists in my esteem. You will do well to preach quietly in your own way, not minding what others say, while your own conscience testifies that you preach the truth. If you are traveling the right road, (to London for instance,) though fifty people should meet you and say that you are wrong; you, knowing you are right, need not mind them. But, alas! the spirit of *self*, which makes us unwilling to hear of contradiction, is not easily subdued.

Letter 18

March 29, 1781

Dear sir,

It is certain I did not wish to leave this town; and likewise that if the

Lord had left me to choose my situation, London would have been almost the last place I should have chosen. But, since it was the Lord's choice for me, I am reconciled and satisfied. He has in this respect given me another heart; for, now that I am fixed here, I seem to prefer it. My sphere of *service* is extremely enlarged, and my sphere of *usefulness* likewise. And, not being under any attachment to systems and parties, I am so far suited to my situation. My hearers are made up of all sorts, and my connections are of all sorts likewise; I mean of those who hold to the head, Jesus Christ. My inclination leads me chiefly to insist on those things in which all who are taught of God agree. And my endeavor is to persuade them to love one another, to bear with one another, to avoid disputes, and, if they must strive, to let their strife and emulation be, who shall most express the life of the Son of God in their temper and conduct.

I preach my own sentiments plainly—but peaceably, and directly oppose no one party. Accordingly, Churchmen and Dissenters, Calvinists and Arminians, Methodists and Moravians, now and then even Papists and Quakers, sit quietly to hear me. I can readily adopt *No Popery* for my motto; but Popery with me has a very extensive sense. I dislike it, whether it be on a throne, as at Rome; or upon a bench, or at a board, as sometimes in London. Whoever wants to confine me to follow his sentiments, whether as to doctrine or church order, is so far a Papist. Whoever encourages me to read the Scriptures, and to pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and then will let me follow the light the Lord gives me, without being angry with me because I cannot, or will not, see with his eyes, nor wear his shoes—is a consistent Christian. The depravity of human nature, the Deity of the Savior, the influences of the Holy Spirit, a separation from the world, and a devotedness to God, these are principles which I deem fundamental. And, though I would love and serve all

mankind, I can have no religious union or communion with those who deny them.

But whether a surplice or a band be the fittest distinction of a minister, whether he be best ordained by the laying on or the holding up of hands; whether water-baptism should be administered by a spoon-full or tub-full, or in a river, in any river, or in Jordan, (as Constantine thought,) are to me points of no great importance. I will go further—though a man does not accord with my views of election—yet if he gives me good evidence that he is effectually called of God—he is my brother! Though he seems afraid of the doctrine of final perseverance; yet, if grace enables him to persevere, he is my brother still. If he loves Jesus, I will love him, whatever hard name he may be called by, and whatever incidental mistakes I may think he holds. His differing from me will not always prove him to be wrong, except I am infallible myself.

I praise the Lord for preserving you from harm when you fell; I have had such falls from horses and received no hurt. When I dislocated my shoulder, I was at my own door, and in the greatest apparent safety. But we are only safe naturally or spiritually—while the Lord holds us up!

Three Letters to a Friend

Letter 1

July 11, 1783

Madam,

I have been much affected with your present situation, and with the case which you did me the honor to propose me for my judgment. I hope it is from some real sense of my own weakness, that I usually undertake the office of a counselor with fear and trembling. How unhappy would I be to mislead you in a point of such importance. How cruel, to wish you to be determined by my decision—unless I am sure that it is warranted by the Word of God. Indeed you have been hardly out of my thoughts since I saw you in the garden. I have considered, again and again, the advice I ventured to give you, and I am the more confirmed in the propriety of it, and in a persuasion that, if the Lord (for what are our resolves without him?) enables you to act the part which you seemed to be satisfied was right, you will never have just cause to blame either yourself or me.

I think the Lord highly honors you, by permitting you to be brought to such a trial, and thereby putting it in your power of giving both to the church and to the world (so far as you are known) such a singular and striking proof of the sincerity of your heart towards him. Surely I shall not cease to pray, that he who has wrought in you to *will*—may strengthen you in his power to *act* accordingly; and that you may do it with cheerfulness.

You have good reason for it, madam. He, for whose sake you are about to reject what many would eagerly receive, deserves it well at your hands. He gave up much more for you: he became very poor—that you might be rich. And, though he was once poor for us, he is

now rich again—rich enough to make you ample amends for all you give up! Do not be afraid. His own kind providence will take charge of you, and surely do you good.

Were your conduct generally known, you would be both blamed or pitied, by those who know of nothing better than *gold*, and such *toys* as gold can purchase. But they will neither blame nor pity you in the great day of your Lord's appearance!

When I see so much *formal profession*, I would be almost discouraged, were it not that the Lord has given me to know a happy and favored few, whose conduct exemplifies and adorns the glorious gospel they profess. In them I see a simplicity, a spirituality, an unselfishness, a submission, and a ready obedience, befitting the servants of such a Master. They have made the choice of Moses; they endure as seeing him who is invisible, and prefer even the reproach of Christ—to all the treasures of Egypt. The sight of one such person in the house of God, animates and comforts a minister more than a crowd of *common hearers*. I bless the Lord that I have the honor of preaching to more than one of this description. "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward!"
Hebrews 11:24-26

Go on, madam, may the Lord be with you. I feel for you, I pray for you, and I rejoice in the hope that I shall soon have to congratulate you that the Lord has given you a complete deliverance, a victory, and filled your heart and mouth with his praise! Think of the rewards

promised to those who overcome, Revelation 2, 3. What can the world propose worthy to be put in competition with these?

I am, Madam, your sincerely affectionate servant.

Letter 2

July 14, 1783

Dear madam,

I was much affected and comforted by your kind answer to my letter yesterday. I believe, as you say, there was something providential in my writing, and, indeed, in the timing of my late agreeable visit, where I had the unexpected pleasure of meeting with you. On Saturday, when I had a quite different business in hand, a thought struck me, which made me lay aside what I was engaged in, to prepare a letter which I thought I could get conveyed to you from church; not thinking I would see you there, and have an opportunity of putting it into your own hand. As you say it proved a means of confirming your mind, I have reason to praise the Lord, (to whom I would ascribe every good and useful motion,) for putting it into my heart to write. I rejoice in your determination; persuaded that the principle upon which you act will bear you through, and that the Lord, whom you desire to serve, will, either in kind or in kindness, afford you a testimony that he approves of your conduct.

We are short-sighted as to *consequences*; but he knows what he is about to do. You have, in His promises, upon which he has enabled you to trust, a greater treasure by far than the Bank of England; and therefore you can be no loser by declining an offer which he only permitted to be made for the trial of your faith and integrity. I have been likewise, in my time, called to make sacrifices, and to give up some advantages for *conscience sake*; though certainly mine were

trifles compared with yours, as you are now situated; and my own experience, as well as my frequent observation of others, convinces me, that, though we may appear to lose something for the Lord—we shall not eventually lose by him. But what I recollect of such things in my own case, and of the manner in which I was led through them, makes me take the liberty of offering a further word of advice upon the subject.

In the first place, I would not have you wonder, if, when your determination is fixed, and the affair quite at an end, you should find, instead of your path being made smoother immediately, fresh difficulties and exigencies arise. I hope it will not be so; but it was so with me. I met with pinches that at times almost staggered me, and strongly tempted me to repent that I had been (as the thought in a dark hour obtruded upon me) *too scrupulous*, and had brought inconveniences upon myself by a punctilio! Still, however, my better judgment spoke a different language, and assured me, it was not a punctilio—but evidently connected with duty and peace of conscience. I could not, I dared not, deliberately repent that I had acted right; but, as I said, I was tempted to it.

The Lord kept me steadfast, as far as outward conduct was concerned; but he alone knows the evil workings of my heart at some seasons. I was, however, supported; and in due time light broke through the darkness, difficulties were removed; he made me good amends, even in a temporal way, for what I had given up—besides, the opportunity it afforded of commending my profession and character, even to the people of the world, who had before affected to despise me as an enthusiast. They seemed to think, many of them to allow, that my religion was better than theirs, because it had enabled me to part with that which they felt they could not have parted with in similar circumstances. If you should be tried something in the like

way, tarry the Lord's leisure, wait patiently upon and for him, and you shall one day see he has not forgotten you, though he should permit you a while to be tried whether you will hold fast your integrity.

Perhaps, when the Lord has enabled us to act honorably in very difficult, ensnaring circumstances, the greatest danger we are liable to, is, lest we should be insensibly drawn into a *too good opinion of our own resolution and constancy*, and indulge a secret self-complacence, instead of giving the whole praise to the Lord. I cannot forget that I felt this evil, nor how much I suffered by it; for the Lord, who mercifully watched over me for good, to prevent my being exalted above measure, was pleased, at the same time that he enabled me to conquer in a greater trial, to leave me to my own weakness in much smaller trial—so that I was left to hesitate, stumble, and fall, in some things so seemingly trivial—that I should have been ashamed of mentioning them to my most intimate friend. Excuse my mentioning this. I trust the caution will to you be unnecessary, after the noble stand the Lord has enabled you to make. I have nothing to wish or pray for you—but that he may preserve you humble and thankful.

My wife unites with me in love to you. Need I say that we shall be very glad to see you, whenever it suits you to call upon us?

Believe me to be, very affectionately and sincerely, yours.

Letter 3

August 19, 1783

Dear madam,

Methinks I well understand the apostle, when he speaks of being

present with his friends in spirit, while absent from them in the body. This morning I mean to make you a visit. May I arrive in a good hour; and may the Lord put some good and seasonable word in my way, that your heart may be comforted. The good hand of the Lord brought us hither in peace and safety; and we are hitherto favored with a preservation from illness, though many are ill around us, and many are falling every day. I do not remember so many people being ill with fevers at one time, during the eighteen years I lived here. I am now very busy among a people whom I have long loved, and who are glad to see me; and, though I am going from house to house almost all day, and every day, I shall hardly be able to see them all while I stay.

Health, when rightly valued, and duly improved, is a great mercy. I hope you have it, and find it so. The mind not only suffers by what the body feels, when ill—but is, for the most part, indisposed by it for the enjoyments of its best privileges. An aching head, or a sick stomach, take off our chariot wheels, engage our attention to our infirmities, preclude us from public ordinances, or unfit us for hearing, if abroad, and for any spiritual exercises when at home. At such a time, we can do little more than simply cast ourselves upon the Lord's care, and wait his will. Indeed, it is well if we can do so much—for, to exercise faith and patience at such a time, is a great thing. If health and spirits are good, we are so far prepared to meet and support the daily trials of life.

I hope you are thus armed, yes, much better; that you are favored with a peaceful frame of mind, a sense of the Lord's presence, and a persuasion that his arm will support you, and surely do you good. Be of good courage; trust in the Lord with all your heart; take up your daily cross, whatever it may be; he is your Shepherd and Guide, to

whom you have committed yourself, and you may be assured that he will lead you the right way.

I can easily conceive that many things in your present situation must be *unpleasant* to you—but, while they are so, they will not be *hurtful*; and the Lord, who has assigned you your present post, is at hand to support you in it, and I trust will honor you with some usefulness while he continues you. Live with him today, and leave *tomorrow* in his hands. Do not let your spirits be burdened as though you were bound to perform impossibilities—but make the best you can of things as they lie before you. You are placed where you are to be a witness for him; perhaps he designs to make you an instrument of good to some who are around you; your example and conduct may have an influence, in this way, far beyond what you expect, even when you do not see it proper to speak a word; but sometimes, probably, a word will be put into your mouth, and you will not speak in vain.

If he had not enabled you to make the *choice of Moses*, you would have avoided the trials you found at ____; you would probably before this time have entered a very different path of life. The world would have either congratulated or envied you; but I would have pitied you. You would soon have felt (what the Lord enabled you to consider without making the experiment) *how little the fine things of this world can contribute to happiness*. Every day would have shown you more of their *vanity*, and every day would have discovered to you new instances of the solid and real evils and troubles which are connected with them. You would either have been carried away with the stream, to the wounding of your conscience and the loss of your spiritual discernment; or, if enabled to stand your ground, you would have found a thorn in every step you took.

Blessed be the Lord who inspired you with wisdom and strength to resist the *golden temptation!* I said then, and I say still, you will never have just cause to repent it. Continue humbly to commit your way to him; he will take care of you, and he can give you, even in temporals, what, upon the whole, shall be much more valuable and comfortable than all that you give up. However that may be, his loving-kindness, and the light of his countenance, are better than life itself.

I warned you, though you knew it before, that the enemy would try, as far as permitted, to distress and worry you. But regard him not; resist him, and he will flee from you. You are in the path of duty; what you cannot *alter—bear* patiently, and the Lord, in his own time, will make the crooked straight. You are, in a peculiar sense, the charge of his providence, and he will not leave you nor forsake you. We hope to be at home on the evening of the 5th. I have great reason to be pleased with my excursion; and blessed be the Lord, the thought of returning to London is very pleasant to me likewise. There (with respect to this world) my treasure is, and there is my heart also. The opportunities of preaching his Word, and of fellowship with his dear people, the many kind and valuable friends he has given me, are more to me than all the mines of Peru.

Let us love, and sing, and wonder,
Let us praise the Savior's name!

Let the world have the world! The Lord has provided better things for His children! "However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him!" 1 Corinthians 2:9. Oh, for grace to be humble, thankful, circumspect, and exemplary, that our light may shine to his praise! I commend you to his gracious protection, and am,

Dear madam, yours most sincerely.

The Great Shepherd

by John Newton

"He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young." Isaiah 40:11

It is not easy for those whose habits of life are insensibly formed by the customs of modern times, to conceive any adequate idea of the *shepherd* life, as it was in the eastern countries, before that simplicity of life, which characterized the early ages, was corrupted by the artificial and false refinements of luxury. Wealth, in those days, consisted principally in flocks and herds; and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, who were, to speak in modern language, *people of high distinction*, were likewise *shepherds*. The book of Genesis, which is an authentic and infallible history of the most ancient times, exhibits a manner of living so different from our own, that, perhaps, few people are qualified to enter fully in the spirit of the description.

The opulence of Jacob may be conjectured from the present he sent to his brother Esau. (Genesis 32:14-15) Yet Jacob attended his flocks himself, "in the drought by day, and in the frost by night." (Genesis 31:40) The vigilance, the providence, the tenderness, necessary to the due discharge of the shepherd's office, have been frequently applied in describing the nature and ends of government; and it has been esteemed a high encomium of a good king, to style him *the Shepherd of His People*. This character of a shepherd, the Messiah, the Savior, condescends to bear; and happy are they who, with a

pleasing consciousness, can say, "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." (Psalm 100:3)

The passage will lead me to speak of the *Shepherd*, the *flock*, and his *care* and tenderness over them.

I. The Shepherd. Our Lord expressly styles himself the "Shepherd," the "*good Shepherd of the sheep*," (John 10:11-14) and the apostle Peter styles him the "*chief Shepherd*." (1 Peter 5:4) His faithful ministers have the honor to be *under* shepherds; he appoints and qualifies them to feed his flock. They are the messengers of His will, but they can do nothing without him; they can only communicate what they receive, and cannot watch over the flock, unless they are themselves watched over by him. (Psalm 127:1) For, with respect to **power** and **authority**, he is the *chief*, and, indeed, the *sole* Shepherd. The eyes of all are upon him, and his eye is upon and over all his flock. The Old Testament church had a shepherd, and their shepherd was Jehovah. (Psalm 23:1) Unless therefore the Shepherd of our souls, is likewise Jehovah; we fall unspeakably short of the privilege of ancient Israel, if their Shepherd was almighty, and if ours could be but a creature.

Surely we could not then say, what yet the apostle affirms, that we have a "better covenant, established upon better promises;" (Hebrews 8:6) since Messiah himself is expressly declared to be the surety and the mediator of this covenant. But would it not be better, *upon this supposition*, with David, who could say, Jehovah is my Shepherd, than with us, who are entrusted to the care of a delegated and inferior keeper, if Jesus is not Jehovah? Besides, who but Jehovah can relieve the necessities of multitudes in all places, in the same moment, and be equally near and attentive to them in every age? The sinner, who is enlightened to know himself, his needs,

enemies, and dangers, will not dare to confide in anything short of an *almighty* arm! He needs a shepherd who is full of wisdom, full of care, full of power; able, like the sun, to shine upon millions at once, and possessed of those transcendent attributes of Deity, omniscience and omnipresence. Such is our *great* Shepherd; and he is eminently the *good* Shepherd also, for he laid down his life for the sheep, and has redeemed them to God by his own blood.

II. The flock. A shepherd is a *relative* name; it has reference to a flock.

This great and good Shepherd has a flock, whom He loved from eternity, and whom having once loved—He will love them to the end! (John 13:1).

He humbled Himself for their sakes, submitted to partake of their nature and their sorrows, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He died for His sheep, "the just for the unjust," (1 Peter 3:18) to redeem them from the curse of the law, from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the power of Satan, and to bring them to God.

They all, by nature, have "gone astray, every one to his own way;" (Isaiah 53:6) but having thus bought them with His blood—in His own appointed time—He seeks, finds, and restores His sheep! By the power of His Word and Spirit, He makes Himself known to their hearts, causes them to hear and understand His voice, and guides them into His fold! Then they become His sheep in the sense of my text. They are under his immediate protection and government.

Considered as *INDIVIDUALS*, they are fitly described by the name of **sheep**. A sheep is a weak, defenseless, foolish creature; prone to wander; and if once it wanders astray, can seldom return of its own

accord. A sheep has neither *strength* to fight with the wolf, nor *speed* to escape from him; nor has it the foresight of the ant, to provide its own sustenance. Such is our character, and our situation! We are unable to take care of ourselves, prone to wander from our resting-place, exposed to enemies which we can neither withstand nor avoid, without any resource in ourselves, and taught, by daily experience, the insufficiency of everything around us. Yet, if Jesus is our Shepherd, as weak and helpless as we are, we may say with David, "The Lord is my Shepherd—I have everything I need! Surely Your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever!"

COLLECTIVELY, they are a **flock**. They are not, indeed, in one place. They are **scattered** abroad, dispersed through different *ages* and *countries*, separated by seas and mountains, and, too often, by misapprehensions and prejudices, by names and forms; and only a very small part of the flock are known to each other. But they are all equally known to him, and equally under his eye. In his view they are *one flock*, one body; they are animated by one and the same Spirit; their views, hopes, and aims are the same; and in a little while, they shall be all brought together, a multitude without number, to rejoice and to join in worship, before his throne of glory. For they have an inheritance reserved for them in heaven, (1 Peter 1:4-5) and they shall be safely kept, while they are sojourners upon earth, for the Shepherd of Israel is their keeper.

III. The Shepherd's care and tenderness over His flock. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." The word "feed" is not restrained to feeding. It includes all the branches of the shepherd's office. He shall act the part of a Shepherd to his flock. We have a beautiful miniature description of what he has engaged to do, and what he actually does, for his people, as their Shepherd, in the

twenty-third Psalm. And the subject is more largely illustrated in the thirty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy. His sheep, from age to age, have been witnesses to the truth of his promises. He has a flock at present who rejoice in his care, and greater multitudes, as yet unborn, shall successively arise in their appointed seasons, "and call him blessed."(Psalm 72:17) For he is the "same yesterday, today, and forever."

"He feeds them." He leads them into green and pleasant pastures. These pastures are, his Word and ordinances, by which he communicates to them of His own fullness; for in strict propriety of speech, he himself is their food. They eat his flesh, and drink his blood. (John 6:54) This was once thought a hard saying (John 6:60) by some of His professed followers, and is still thought so by too many. But it is his own saying, and therefore I am not concerned, either to confirm or to vindicate it. The knowledge they receive by faith, of his incarnation and sufferings unto death, of the names he bears, and of the offices and relations in which he is pleased to act for them, is the life and food of their souls. The expression of feeding them, is agreeable to the analogy he has been pleased to establish, between the natural and the spiritual life. As the strength of the body is maintained and renewed by eating and drinking; so they who, in this sense, feed upon him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving, even they live (John 6:57) by him; "for His flesh is food indeed, and his blood is drink indeed."

"He guides them." First by his example. He has trodden the path of duty and trial before them; and they perceive and follow his footsteps. Again, by his *Word* and *Spirit*, he teaches them the way in which they should go; and both inclines and enables them to walk in it. (Isaiah 30:21) He guides them, likewise, by his *Providence*; he appoints the bounds of their habitations, the line and calling in

which they are to serve him, and orders and adjusts the circumstances of their lives according to his infinite wisdom, so as, finally, to accomplish his gracious designs in their favor.

"He guards them." It is written concerning him, "He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." (Mic. 5:4) If we conceive of a flock of sheep feeding in the midst of wolves, who are restrained from breaking in upon them, not by any visible enclosure, but merely by the power of the shepherd's eye, which keeps them in awe and at a distance, it will give us some idea of the situation of his people. He provides them food in the midst of many and mighty (Psalm 23:5) enemies, who envy them their privilege, but cannot prevent it. If he should withdraw his attention from the flock, for a single minute, they would be harassed. But he has promised to keep them night and day (Isaiah 27:3) and every moment; therefore their enemies plot and rage in vain. Their visible foes are numerous; and if we could look into the invisible world, and take a view of the subtlety, malice, machinations, and assiduity of the powers of darkness, who are incessantly watching for opportunities of destroying them, we would have a most striking conviction, that a flock so defenseless and feeble in themselves, and against which such a combination is formed, can only be kept by the power of God.

"He heals them." A good shepherd will examine the state of his flock. But there is no attention worthy of being compared with his. Not the slightest circumstance in their concerns escapes his notice. When they are ready to faint, borne down with heavy exercises of mind, wearied with temptations, dry and disconsolate in their spirits, he seasonably revives them. Nor are they in heaviness without a need-be for it. All his dispensations towards them are medicinal, designed to correct, or to restrain, or to cure, the maladies of their souls. And

they are adjusted, by his wisdom and tenderness, to what they can bear, and to what their case requires.

It is he, likewise, who heals their bodily sickness, and gives them help in all their temporal troubles. He is represented to us, as counting their sighs, (Psalm 56:1) putting their tears into his bottle, recording their sorrows in his book of remembrance; and even, as being himself "touched with a feeling of their infirmities," (Hebrews 4:15) as the head feels for the members of the body.

"He restores them." The power and subtlety of their enemies are employed to force or entice them from his rule; and too often prevail for a season. The sheep turn aside unto forbidden paths; and whenever they do, they would wander farther and farther, until they were quite lost again, if he were not their Shepherd. If he permits them to deviate, he has a time to convince them, "that it was an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord their Shepherd," (Jer. 2:19) and to humble them, and to bring them back. Thus they become more sensible of their own weakness, and of their obligations to his gracious care; for he will not allow their enemies to triumph over them. He will not lose one of his true flock; not one convinced sinner, who has, in deed and in truth, surrendered and entrusted his all to him. They must, and they shall, smart and mourn for their folly; but he will, in due season, break their snares, and lead them again into the paths of peace, for his own name's sake.

The flock are not all *sheep*. There are among them **lambs**. These are especially mentioned, and for these he expresses a peculiar tenderness. "He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart." Though they are weaklings, they shall not be left behind. This is a beautiful and tender image. If a poor lamb is weary,

and unable to keep up with the flock, it shall be carried. This clause affords encouragement,

1. To young people. Early serious impressions are often made upon the hearts of children, which we are to cherish by directing their thoughts to the compassion of the good Shepherd, who has said, "Let the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." (Mar. 10:14) This high and holy One, who humbles himself to notice the worship of the heavenly host, hears the prayers of worms upon the earth; and his ear is open to the prayers of a child, no less so than to the prayer of a king.

2. To young converts. These, at whatever age, are children in the Lord's family, lambs in his flock. They are, as yet, weak, unsettled, and inexperienced. Almost every day brings them into a new and untried situation. They often meet with opposition and discouragement. Perhaps their nearest friends are displeased with them. They are liable, likewise, while they are inquiring the way to Zion, to be perplexed by the various opinions and angry contentions prevailing among the different religious people or parties to whom they may address themselves. They are frequently discouraged by the falls and miscarriages of professors, some of whom, it is possible, they may have admired, and looked up to, as patterns for their own imitation. Add to these things, what they suffer from new and unexpected discoveries of the evil and deceitfulness of their hearts; the mistakes they commit, in judgment and practice, for lack of a more solid, and extensive knowledge of the Scriptures; and the advantage the great enemy of their souls derives from these their various difficulties to assault their peace and obstruct their progress. What would become of them in such circumstances, if their faithful Shepherd had not promised to lead, and uphold them, with the arm of his power?

There is, likewise, particular mention made of "the mother sheep with their young." These he will gently lead. This may signify a state of conviction or trouble. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," (Psalm 34:19) by which they are often wearied and heavy laden. But when their spirits are overwhelmed within them, he knows their path. Jacob would not permit his cattle that were with young to be over-driven for one day, lest they should die. (Genesis 33:13) Much less will this good Shepherd allow the burdened among his flock to be hurried and tempted beyond what they are able, or what he will enable them, to bear.

"The mother sheep with their young." Two sorts of people in the Lord's flock, who come under this description, feel an especial need of his compassion, tenderness, and patience.

1. He only knows the feelings of the hearts of parents; what solicitude and concern they have for their young ones, the sucklings of the flock, which mingle with all their endeavors, to manage rightly the important charge committed to them, and to bring their "children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

2 Ministers, likewise, have painful exercises of mind. The apostle Paul speaks of "travailing in birth again, until Christ is formed in our hearts." (Galatians 4:19) When we know of any newly awakened, and beginning to seek their salvation, how solicitous is our care to bring them forward, to comfort them, to warn them against the devices of their hearts, and of their enemies! And how piercing our grief and disappointment, if they miscarry! How much is felt in sympathy for the trials of the flock! What wisdom, faithfulness, courage, meekness, and unction from on high—are necessary to the due discharge of what we owe to the flocks of which we have the oversight! Who is sufficient for these things? And when we have done our best, our all,

what defects and defilements have we to mourn over? But this is our great consolation, that he, who knows us, and leads us, considers "our frame, and remembers that we are but dust."

In this delineation of the character and conduct of the "Great Shepherd of the sheep," (Hebrews 13:20) we have an affecting exemplar and pattern, for the imitation of those who act in the honorable office of under shepherds, and are called, by their profession and engagement, to feed his sheep and lambs. Whether there are any ministers in our assembly or not, you will at least permit me to speak a word to my own heart; which may, I hope, at the same time, impress your minds with a sense of our great need of your prayers. "Brethren, pray for us," (1 Thes. 5:25) and "pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send forth more faithful laborers into his harvest." (Mat. 9:38) For it is his work alone.

It is not necessary, that a minister of the Gospel should be in the first line of those who are admired for their abilities or literature; much less that he should be distinguished by such titles, honors, and emoluments, as this world can give. But it is necessary, and of the last importance to his character and usefulness here, and to his acceptance in the great day of the Lord, that he should have a shepherd's *eye* and a shepherd's *heart*. He must serve the flock, "not for filthy lucre, or by constraint" (1 Peter 5:2-3) (that constraint, which the apostle attributes to the love of Christ, only excepted), "but willingly," and with a view to their edification. And he must, indeed, serve them, not acting as a "lord over God's heritage, but as an example to the flock." Not preaching "himself," (2 Corinthians 4:5) perverting his sacred office to the purposes of ambition or vain-glory, or the acquisition of wealth; but preaching Christ Jesus the Lord, and employing all his powers to turn sinners from the error of their ways.

"He who wins souls is wise." (Pro. 11:30) If it is wisdom to propose the *noblest* end—the faithful minister is wise; the end at which he aims, in subordination to the will and glory of God, is the salvation of souls. The recovery of one immortal soul to the favor and image of God, is, and will at length be found, a greater and more important event, than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from slavery or temporal ruin. If it is wisdom to pursue a right end by the fittest means, he is wise; he knows the Gospel of Christ to be the power of God, the appointed, the effectual, the only sufficient means for accomplishing his great purpose. Therefore, however unfashionable it may be, he is not ashamed of it, he preaches it, and he glories in it.

If it is an effect of wisdom, not to be deterred from the prosecution of a great and noble design by the censure and dislike of weak and incompetent judges—the faithful minister is truly wise. He loves his fellow-creatures, and would willingly please them for their good; but he cannot fear them, because he fears and serves the Lord. He looks forward, with desire, to the day of that solemn and general visitation, when the "Shepherd and Guardian of souls shall himself appear." (1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:4) And if he may then stand among those who are pardoned and accepted in the Beloved, and receive the "crown of life, which his Lord has promised to those who love him," (2 Timothy 4:8). This thought fully reconciles him to the trials of his situation; and however depreciated, misrepresented, opposed, or ill-treated here, he can say, "None of these things move me, neither do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24)

There is a counterpart to this character, described in strong and glowing language by the prophets. There are selfish shepherds, who feed not the flock, but themselves; (Ezekiel 34:2) who neither

attempt to heal the sick, to strengthen the feeble, to bind up that which is broken, nor recover that which has been driven away; shepherds, (Isaiah 56:10-11) who cannot understand, greedy, lovers of gain—and who, by a change of metaphor, are compared to *slumbering watchmen*, and *dumb dogs* that cannot bark. The New Testament teaches us to expect that such people, under the name of *ministers*, will be found likewise in the visible church of Christ; men of corrupt minds, (1 Timothy 6:5; Romans 16:18) destitute of the truth, who serve not the Lord Jesus, but their own belly: men who are of the world, (1 John 4:5) and speak of the world; and therefore the world hears and favors them.

But, alas!—neither the wretched slave who toils at the galley-oar, nor he who is doomed to labor in a deep coal mine, where the light of the sun never reaches him, nor the lunatic who howls on a chain, are such emphatical objects of our compassion, as the unhappy man who prostitutes the name and function of a minister of Christ to the gratification of his pride and avarice; and whose object is not the welfare of the flock, but the possession of the fleece! Who intrudes into the post of a watchman, but gives no alarm of the impending danger (Ezekiel 33:7-8).

If the Scriptures are true; if the Gospel is not indeed, as Pope Leo the tenth profanely styled it, "a lucrative fable"; the more the minister accumulates riches, the more he rises in dignity, the more his influence extends, the more he is to be commiserated. He may have the reward he seeks: he may be admired and flattered; he may, for a season, be permitted to withstand and refute the efforts of the Lord's faithful servants; he may shine as a scholar or a courtier: but nothing less than repentance, and faith in the Redeemer, whose name and cause he has dishonored, can finally screen him from the full effect of

that terrible denunciation, "Woe to that worthless shepherd who forsakes" or neglects "the flock!" (Zechariah 11:17)

The Lord Reigns!

John Newton

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns!"

Revelation 19:6

The book of the Revelation, being chiefly prophetic, will not perhaps be fully understood, until the final accomplishment of the events shall draw near, and throw a stronger light upon the whole book. But, while the learned commentators have been hitherto divided and perplexed in their attempts to illustrate many parts of it, there are other parts well adapted for the instruction and refreshment of plain Christians; particularly those passages in which the scenery and images seemed designed to give us some representation of the *happiness and worship of the heavenly state*. Thus a plain unlettered believer, when reading with attention the fourth and fifth chapters, though he cannot give a reason why there are 24 elders, why there are 4 living creatures, and why the number of their wings is neither more nor less than six; yet, from the whole description of the Lamb upon the throne, the songs of the redeemed, and the chorus of the angels, he receives such an impression of glory, as awakens his gratitude, desire, and joy, and excites him likewise to take up the same song of praise "to him who has loved him, and washed him from his sins in his own blood." He is content to leave the discussion of *hard questions* to learned men, while he feeds by faith upon those *simple truths* which can be relished only by a

spiritual taste; and which, where there is such a taste, make their way to the heart, without the assistance of academic inquisition.

The subject of the preceding chapter, is the destruction of mystical Babylon, the head of the opposition against the kingdom of the Lord Christ. But Babylon sinks like a millstone in the mighty ocean, and is no more found. So must all his enemies perish. The catastrophe of Babylon, like that of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, is beheld by the saints and servants of the Lord with admiration, and furnishes them with a theme for a song of triumph to his praise. This may be properly styled *sacred music* indeed. It is commanded, inspired, and regulated by the Lord himself. The performers are all interested in the subject, "they who fear God," and are devoted to his service and glory. And though people of this character are comparatively few upon earth, hidden, and in a manner lost, among the crowd of mankind; they will be, when brought together at last, a very large company. Their united voices are here compared to the voice of many waters, and of mighty thunders, and this is the solemn close, the chorus of their song, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!"

The impression which the performance of this passage in "Handel's Messiah" usually makes upon the audience, is well known. But however great the power of music may be, should we even allow the flights of poetry to be truth, that it can "soften rocks, and bend the knotted oak," one thing we are sure it cannot do; it cannot soften and change the hard heart, it cannot bend the obdurate will of man. If all the people who hear "Handel's Messiah", who are struck and astonished, for the moment, by this chorus in particular, were to bring away with them an abiding sense of the importance of the sentiment it contains, the nation would soon wear a new face. But do the professed lovers of sacred music, in this enlightened age,

generally live as if they really believed that "the Lord God omnipotent reigns?" Rather, do not the greater part of them live, as they might do if they were sure of the contrary? as if they were satisfied to a demonstration, that either there is no God, or that his providence is not concerned in human affairs? I appeal to conscience; I appeal to fact.

I apprehend that this passage, taken in the strictest sense, refers to a period not yet arrived. Babylon is not yet fallen. The servants of God in the present day, will most probably fulfill their appointed time upon earth, like those who have lived before them, in a state of conflict. They must endure the cross, and sustain opposition for his sake. The people who shall live when "the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ," when the "nations shall learn war no more," are yet unborn. But even now we may rejoice that "the Lord God omnipotent reigns," and that Jesus is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." I must consider my text as referring to him.

The Christian doctrine is, that the Lord God omnipotent exercises his dominion and government, in the person of Christ. "The Father loves the Son, and has committed all things into his hands." (John 3:35) And thus our Lord, after his resurrection, assured his disciples, "All power in heaven and in earth is committed unto me." (Mat. 28:18) He has already "taken to himself his great power, and reigns." His right of reigning over all is essential to his divine nature; but the administration of government in the nature of man, is the effect and reward of his obedience unto death. But in the union of both natures, he is one person, Christ Jesus the Lord. All the riches and fullness of the Godhead, all the peculiar honors of the Mediator, center in him. They may be distinguished, but they are inseparable.

Happy are they who can, upon solid and Scriptural grounds, exult in the thought that the Lord reigns, and can make his government the subject of their hallelujahs and praises! Happy they, who see, acknowledge, and admire his management in the kingdom of providence, and are the willing subjects of his kingdom of grace. Let us take a brief survey of his reigning glory in these kingdoms.

I. Great and marvelous is the Lord God Almighty—in his kingdom of **Universal Providence**. His mighty arm sustains the vast fabric of the universe. He upholds the *stars* in their courses. If we attentively consider their multitude, their magnitudes, their distances from us and from each other, and the amazing swiftness, variety, and regularity of their motions—our minds are overwhelmed, our thoughts confounded, by the vastness and the wonders of the scene. But He spoke them into being, and they are preserved in their stations and revolutions by his power and agency.

If we fix our thoughts upon the *earth*, though in comparison of the immensity of his creation, it is but as a grain of sand—it is the object of his incessant care. All its various inhabitants derive their existence and their support from him. He provides for the young ravens when unable to fly, and for the young lions that traverse the woods. The instinct of animals, whereby they are unerringly instructed in whatever concerns the welfare and preservation of their species, so vastly exceeding the boasted wisdom of man, that he can neither imitate nor comprehend it, is communicated by him. He teaches the birds to build their nests, the spider to weave his web, and instructs the communities of bees, and insignificant emmets, to form their admirable policies and government among themselves.

If we speak of *intelligent beings*, "He does what he pleases in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." He

directs and overrules the counsels and purposes of men, so that, though they act freely, the outcome of all their different interfering schemes, is only the accomplishment of his purposes. When they are employed as his instruments, from small beginnings, and in defiance of difficulties apparently insuperable, they succeed beyond their own expectations. When unhappily engaged against his designs, in vain they rage and plot. He takes the wise in their own craftiness, pours contempt upon their power and policy, and all their great preparations melt like a mist, or like snow before the sun, and leave no trace behind.

Still more wonderful, to the eye of faith, is his control over *Satan* and the powers of darkness. Whatever, for wise reasons, though unknown to us, he may permit them to do—they cannot, with all their subtlety or strength, detain one soul in their bondage longer than until his appointed time of release; nor recover one soul back to their dominion, of which he is pleased to undertake the care. On the contrary, he breaks the heads of these *Leviathan* in pieces, turns their counsels against themselves, and makes them instrumental in purifying his people, and extending his church, by the means they employ for the destruction of both. Thus those who dwell under his shadow are safe; for all things are in his power, and he always cares for them, and keeps them, as the pupil of his eye. And therefore, though they are exercised with trials, and suffer many things for their good, his eye being always upon them, and his ear open to their prayer, they are supported, supplied, relieved, delivered, and, at last, made more than conquerors.

II. He has a peculiar kingdom, which he has established distinct from the kingdoms of this world, though diffused and extended among them, and which, in due time, like leaven, will pervade and assimilate them all to himself. This is the kingdom of the Gospel, his

church. It is founded upon a rock, and though the gates of hell continually war against it, they cannot prevail. For he is "a wall of fire round about it, and a glory in the midst of it." (Zech. 2:5)

Here he reigns upon a throne of grace. He possesses and exercises unlimited authority as a sovereign, to save whom he pleases, to pardon all manner of sins and offences, and to admit rebels and enemies, when they submit themselves and bow to his gracious scepter, into the number of his children and his friends. Seldom do the kings of the earth publish an act of grace in the favor of those who have been guilty of rebellion, without clogging it with exceptions. Either they feel a resentment against some of the delinquents, which they have not magnanimity sufficient to conquer, or they dare not trust them. But God's mercy is infinite—and he knows how to change their hearts—when he pardons their sins.

Perhaps it may not be a digression wholly unuseful and impertinent, if I take this occasion to point out the several senses in which the word **church** may be understood agreeably to the Scripture.

1. It denotes, in the aggregate, the *mystical* church, the whole body of that spiritual kingdom, of which the Redeemer is the living and life-giving head. (Col. 1:18) A succession of these has appeared upon earth in every age, from the days of righteous Abel, whom Cain slew; and we have reason to believe, that the far greater part of them are yet unborn. They will all be assembled together before the throne, in the great day of his final appearance, and inherit the kingdom of glory prepared for them. This is the "church which God has bought with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) Happy are those who belong to this society of the redeemed, "whose names are written in heaven."

2. The visible church contains all those who bear and acknowledge the name of Christians, and who admit and enjoy the Gospel

revelation. But it is a small thing to belong only to the **visible** church, for it is compared to a threshing-floor (Mat. 3:12) on which chaff is mingled with the wheat; to a field in which tares grow promiscuously with the good seed; to a fish-net enclosing a great multitude of fish, both good and bad. (Matt. 13:24-47) But a time of separation will come. The chaff and the tares, and whatever is evil, will be consumed. Alas! what will it avail at last to say, "Lord, we have eaten and drank in your presence," at your table with your true disciples, "and you have taught in our streets," (Luke 13:26-27) and we have heard in our own language of your wonderful works, if you say, "Depart from Me, you evildoers!" My heart is pained with the apprehension, lest some of you who have joined in the same public worship with true believers, have sat in the same seat, and lived in the same families, should at last see them, with whom you have been very nearly connected in this world, received into the kingdom of heaven—and you yourselves be shut out!

3. The **universal** church, in any one period, is that part of the visible church which is united to the Lord by living faith. It comprises all who agree in the profession of the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and whose conversation is regulated by its precepts, or, in the apostle's words, "All who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Ephesians 6:24) This universal church, through the policy of Satan and the deceitfulness of the heart, is too much divided against itself. Prejudice, bigotry, and remaining ignorance, greatly prevent that desirable union among true Christians, which would promote their peace, comfort, and increase, and would contribute more than a thousand arguments to put their adversaries to shame and to silence. That shameful contention for *denominations*, parties, and favorite preachers, for which the apostle reproved the Corinthians, (1 Corinthians 3:4) is still greatly to be lamented. But, though they are too backward in acknowledging and assisting each other, the Lord is

merciful to their weakness, and bears with them all. And as they grow in grace, and drink more into his spirit—their hearts are enlarged, and they approach nearer to his pattern of love, patience, and tenderness.

4. The word church is applied to *particular societies* of Christians, who are connected by a participation in the same ordinances of the Gospel, and who maintain a scriptural separation from the sinful spirit and customs of the world. And though there may be pretenders among them, as there were among the apostolic churches, they are denominated by the better part. They belong to the universal church by their profession of the truth, and of course they are a part of the visible church: and those of them who are, in deed and in truth, what they profess to be, are living members of the mystical church, to which all the promises are made. By whatever name they are known or distinguished among men, they are "branches of the true vine," they "have their fruit unto holiness, and their end everlasting life." But to return:

In this his church, or spiritual kingdom, he rules by wise and gracious laws and ordinances. He releases his subjects from all human authority, in point of conscience—but his own; and enjoins them to call no one master—but himself. (Mat. 23:8-10) If they "stand fast in the liberty with which he has made them free," (Galatians 5:1) they will not give themselves up implicitly to the dictates of any man, nor follow him farther than he follows their Lord. And consequently, if they are influenced by his royal law of doing to others—as they would that others should do unto them, they will not attempt to exert an undue authority, or wish to be called masters themselves, so as to assume a dogmatic carriage, or to expect a universal and absolute submission. But it must be owned that, in our present state of infirmity, this privilege is not sufficiently prized,

nor this command duly complied with, there being scarcely a man who does not either arrogate too much to himself, or allow too much to others. A fault in the one or the other of these respects, may be assigned as a principal cause of most of the evils which deform the appearance, or injure the peace of the church. But the design of his Gospel is to set his people at liberty from the yoke of *men*, from the fetters of custom and tradition, of superstition and will-worship, that they may enjoy, in his service, a state of perfect freedom.

For it is the principal glory of his kingdom, that Christ reigns in the hearts of all His people. There He writes His precepts, impresses His image, and erects His throne; ruling them, not merely by an outward law, but by an inward secret influence, breathing His own life and spirit into them; so that their obedience becomes, as it were, natural, pleasurable, and its own reward. By the discoveries He affords them of His love—He wins their affections, captivates their wills, and enlightens their understandings. They derive from Him the "spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind," (2 Timothy 1:7) and run with alacrity in the way of His commandments

It is impossible, therefore, to make this song our own, and cordially to rejoice that "the Lord God omnipotent reigns," unless we are the willing subjects of his government; unless we are really pleased with his appointed way of salvation, approve of his precepts, and, from a view of his wisdom and goodness, can cheerfully submit and resign ourselves to the disposal of his wise and gracious providence. In all these respects we are by nature at variance with him. We are too proud to be indebted to his grace, too wise in our own conceits to desire his instruction, too obstinately attached to the love and practice of sin, to be capable of relishing the beauty and spirituality of his commandments. And our love of the world, and the things of it, is too strong and grasping, to permit us to be satisfied with the lot

and with the dispensations he appoints for us. We wish, if possible, and as far as possible we attempt, to be our own god. We are unthankful when he bestows, impatient if he withholds, and if he sees fit to take back the gifts of which we are unworthy, we repine and rebel against his will. This enmity must be subdued, before we can be pleased with his government: in other words, we must be changed, we must be made new creatures.

To produce this change, this new creation, the Gospel is the only expedient; and when revealed and applied to the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, the miracle is wrought. The sinner who is first convinced of his guilt and misery, and then reconciled to God by faith in the great atonement, willingly yields to his administration. He owns and feels the propriety of his proceedings, is ready to acknowledge, in his sharpest afflictions, that the Lord is gracious, and has not dealt with him according to the desert of his iniquities. He considers himself as no longer his own, but bought with a price, and brought under the strongest obligations, "to live no longer to himself, but to him who loved him, and gave himself for him." And what was before his dread and dislike, becomes now the joy of his heart, the thought that the Lord reigns, and that all his concerns are in the hands of him who does all things well.

Are there any among us who say in their hearts, "We will not have this" Savior "to rule over us?" The thought is no less vain than wicked! He must, he will "reign, until he has subdued all enemies under his feet." You must either bend—or break before him!

Little trials

October 15, 1774.

My dear friend,

I think the greatness of trials is to be estimated rather by the impression they make upon our spirits, than by their outward appearance. The smallest will be too heavy for us if we are left to grapple with it in our own strength, or rather weakness. And if the Lord is pleased to put forth his power in us, he can make the heaviest trial light. A lively impression of his love, or of his sufferings for us, or of the glories within the veil, accompanied with a due sense of the misery from which we are redeemed; these thoughts will enable us to be not only submissive—but even joyful, in tribulations. When faith is in exercise, though the *flesh* will have its feelings, the *spirit* will triumph over them.

But it is needful that we should know that we have no sufficiency in ourselves, and in order to know it, we must feel it; and therefore the Lord sometimes withdraws his sensible influence, and then the *buzzing of a fly* will be an overmatch for our patience. At other times he will show us what he can do in us and for us; then we can adopt the Apostle's words, and say—I can do and suffer all things, through Christ strengthening me. He has said, My grace is sufficient for you.

It is observable, that the children of God seldom disappoint our expectations under great trials; if they show a wrongness of spirit, it is usually in such little incidents that we are ready to wonder at them. For which, two reasons may be principally assigned. When great trials are in view, we run simply and immediately to our all-sufficient Friend, feel our dependence, and cry in good earnest for help; but if the occasion seems small, we are too apt secretly to lean to our own wisdom and strength, as if in such slight matters we could make shift without him. Therefore in these we often fail.

Again: the Lord deals with us as we sometimes see mothers with their children. When a child begins to walk, he is often very self-important: he thinks he needs no help, and can hardly bear to be supported by the finger of another. Now in such a case, if there is no danger of harm from a fall, as if he is on a plain carpet, the mother will let him alone to try how he can walk. He is pleased at first—but shortly, down he goes! A few experiments of this kind convince him that he is not so strong and able as he thought, and make him willing to be led. But was he upon the brink of a river or a precipice, from whence a fall might be fatal, the tender mother would not trust him to himself—no not for a moment! I have not room to make the application, nor is it needful. It requires the same grace to bear with a right spirit a cross *word*—as a cross *injury*; or the breaking of a china plate—as the death of an only son.

The Lord Only Afflicts for Our Good

December 21, 1776.

My dear Friend,

Your letter brought me tidings of joy, and then furnished me with materials for a bonfire upon the occasion. It was an act of passive obedience to burn it—but I did obey. I congratulate you upon the happy outcome to which the Lord has brought your affairs. I see that his good Spirit and good providence have been and are with you. I doubt not but your union with Miss **** will be a mutual blessing, and on your part heightened by being connected with such a family. I could enlarge upon this head, if my letter likewise was to be burnt as soon as you have read it. I look upon the friendship the Lord has

given me there, as one of my prime privileges; and I hope I shall always be thankful that it proved a means of introducing you into it.

I congratulate you likewise upon your accession to *****, not because it is a good living, in a genteel neighborhood, and a fine country; but because I believe the Lord sends you there for fulfilling the desires he has given you of being useful to souls. Church advancement in any other view, is dreadful! I would as soon congratulate a man upon seeing a millstone tied about his neck, to sink him into the depths of the sea, as upon his obtaining what is called a good living, except I thought him determined to spend and be spent in the cause of the Gospel. A parish is an solemn millstone indeed, to those who see nothing valuable in the flock but the fleece!

But the Lord has impressed your heart with a sense of the glory and importance of his truth, and the worth of souls; and animated your zeal by the most powerful motive—the knowledge of his constraining love. Your case is extraordinary. Perhaps, when you review in your mind the circle of your former mirthful acquaintances, you may say, with Job's servant, "I alone have escaped alive!" The rest are either removed into their eternal state, or are still *hurrying down the stream of dissipation*, and living without God in the world. Yet there was a time when there seemed no more probability on your side—than on theirs; that you should obtain mercy, and be called to the honor of preaching the glorious Gospel.

You are setting out with every possible advantage in early life, with a cheerful flow of health, and affluent circumstances; and now, to crown all, the Lord gives you the very choice of your heart in a partner; one who, besides deserving and meeting your affection, will, I am persuaded, be a real help-meet to you in your spiritual walk. *How much is here to be thankful for!*

I trust the Lord has given you, and will maintain in you, a right spirit; so as not to rest in his *gifts*—but to hold them in connection with the love and favor of the *Giver*. It is a low time with us, when the greatest assemblage of earthly blessings can seem to satisfy us without a real communion with him. His grace is sufficient for you—but undoubtedly such a scene of prosperity as seems to lie before you, is full of snares—and calls for a double effort of watchfulness and prayer. Your situation will fix many eyes upon you, and Satan will doubtless watch you, and examine every corner of the hedge around you—to see if he can find a gap by which to enter. We have but few *rich* Gospel ministers; but it is too evident that Satan has found the way to damp the zeal and hurt the spirits of some of those few, who for a time acted nobly, and seemed to walk out of the reach of the allurements of the world.

I am not jealous of you; I feel a comfortable persuasion, that *the Lord has taken a fast hold of your heart—and given you a fast hold of his Almighty arm!* Yet I believe you will not be displeased with me for dropping a hint of this kind, and at this time.

You have heard of the trial with which the Lord has been pleased to visit us; it still continues, though considerably alleviated. It is tempered with many mercies, and I hope he disposes us in a measure, to submission. I trust it will be for good. My dear friend, you are coming into my school, where you will learn, as occasions offer, to feel more for the afflictions of others. But be not discouraged; **the Lord only afflicts for our good.** It is necessary that our sharpest trials should sometimes spring from our dearest comforts, else we would be in danger of setting up our rest here. In such a world, and with such hearts as we have—we shall often need something to prevent our cleaving to the dust, to quicken us to

prayer, and to make us feel that our dependence for one hour's peace is upon the Lord alone.

I am ready to think I have known as much of the good and happiness which this world can afford, as most people who live in it. *I never saw the person with whom I wished to exchange places.* And for many years past I have thought my trials have been light and few, compared with what many, or most, of the Lord's people have endured. And yet, though in the main possessed of my own wishes, when I look back upon the twenty-seven years past, I am ready to style them, with Jacob, "few and evil;" and to give the sum-total of their contents in Solomon's words, "all is vanity." If I take these years to pieces, I see a great part of them was filled up with sins, sorrows, and inquietudes. The *pleasures*, too, are gone, and have no more real existence than the baseless fabric of a dream!

The shadows of the evening will soon begin to come over us; and if our lives are prolonged, a thousand pains and infirmities, from which the Lord has in a remarkable measure exempted us hitherto—will probably overtake us; and at last we must feel the parting pang. Sin has so envenomed the soil of this earth, that the amaranth will not grow upon it. But we are hastening to a better world, and bright unclouded skies, where our sun will go down no more—and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes!

The Furnace of Affliction

September 27, 1777.

My dear Friend,

I could not, at such a time as this, refrain from writing; and glad

would I be, if the Lord may help me to drop a suitable word, and accompany it with a blessing to you in the reading.

I am glad to be assured (though I expected no less) that your sick wife happily feels herself safe in the Lord's hand, and under the care of the good Shepherd and Savior, to whom she has often committed herself; and finds him faithful to his promise, giving her strength in her soul according to her day, and enabling her quietly to submit to his holy, wise, and gracious will. And it is my prayer, that he may strengthen you likewise, and reveal his own all-sufficiency so clearly and powerfully to your heart, that you may not be afraid of any event--but cheerfully rely upon him, to be all that to you, in every circumstance and change, which his promise warrants you to expect.

I am willing to hope, that this is but a short season of concern, appointed for the exercise of your faith and patience, and to give you, in his good time, a signal proof of his power and goodness in answering prayer. He sometimes brings us into such a situation, when *creature help* is utterly unavailing, that we may afterwards be more clearly sensible of his interposition. Then we experimentally learn the vanity of all things here below, and are brought to a more immediate and absolute dependence upon himself. We have need of having these lessons frequently inculcated upon us; but when his end is answered, how often, after he has caused grief, does he show his great compassion, and save us from our fears by an outstretched arm, and with such a seasonable and almost unexpected relief, as constrains us to cry out, "What has God wrought!" and "Who is a God like unto you!" Such, I hope, will be the issue of your present trial, and that He who gave her to you at first, will restore her to you again.

You are in **the furnace of affliction**; but the Lord is sitting by it as a refiner of silver, to moderate the fire, and manage the process, so that you shall lose nothing but dross, and be brought forth as refined gold, to praise his name. Apparent difficulties, however great, are nothing to him. If He speaks--it is done; for to God the Lord belong the issues of life and death. Should his pleasure be otherwise, and should he call your dear partner to a state of glory before you--still I know he is able to support you. What he does, however painful to the flesh, must be right, because He does it. Having bought us with his blood, and saved our souls from hell, he has every kind of right to dispose of us and ours--as he pleases. And this we are sure of, he will not lay so much upon us--as he freely endured for us; and he can make us amends for all we suffer, and for all we lose--by the light of his countenance. A few years will set all to rights; and those who love him and are beloved by him, though they may *suffer* as others, shall not *sorrow* as others; for the Lord will be with them here--and he will soon have them with him! There, all tears shall be wiped from their eyes!

Perhaps I know as well how to calculate the pain of such a separation, as anyone who has not actually experienced it. Many a time the desire of my eyes has been threatened, many a time my heart has been brought low; but from what I have known at such seasons, I have reason to hope, that, had it been his pleasure to bring upon me the thing that I feared, his everlasting arm would have upheld me from sinking under the stroke. As ministers, we are called to comfort the Lord's afflicted people, and to tell them the *knowledge of his love* is a cordial able to keep the soul alive under the sharpest trials. We must not wonder that he sometimes puts us in a way of *showing* that we do not deal in unfelt truths--but that we find ourselves that solid consolation in the Gospel, which we encourage others to expect from it. You have now such an occasion of glorifying

the Lord; I pray he may enable you to improve it, and that all around you may see that he is with you, and that his good Word is the support and anchor of your soul. Then I am sure, if it upon the whole it is best for you--that he will give you the desire of your heart, and you shall yet live to praise him together.

A Christian's Attainments in the Present Life

February, 1772

Dear sir,

I have been sitting perhaps a quarter of an hour with my pen in my hand, and my finger upon my upper lip, contriving how I should begin my letter. A detail of the confused incoherent thoughts which have successively passed through my mind, would have more than filled the sheet; but your patience, and even your charity for the writer, would have been tried to the uttermost, if I could have penned them all down. At length my suspense reminded me of the Apostle's words, Gal. 5:17, "You cannot do the things that you would." This is a *humbling* but a *just* account of **a Christian's attainments in the present life**, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less, the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given his people a *desire* and *will* aiming at *great* things; without this they would be unworthy the name of Christians. But they cannot do as they would—their best desires are weak and ineffectual; not absolutely so (for he who works in them to will, enables them in a *measure* to do likewise)—but in comparison with the mark at which they *aim*.

So that, while they have great cause to be *thankful* for the desire he has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered, they have equal reason to be *ashamed* and *abased* under a sense of their *continual defects*, and the *evil mixtures* which taint and debase their best endeavors. It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars which a believer would do if he could—but in which, from first to last, he finds a humiliating inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

He would willingly enjoy God in prayer. He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in His judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honor and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles himself to behold the things which are in heaven, that he should stoop so much lower, to afford his gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth! The Christian can bid others to expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind and greater in degree than all that the world can afford. By prayer, he can say—You have liberty to cast all your cares upon him who cares for you. By one hour's intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes his glory to pass before the soul that seeks him—you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort, than by a day or a week's converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many books! And in this light, he would consider prayer, and improve it for himself. But, alas! how seldom can he do as he would! How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad to omit with a just excuse? The chief pleasure he derives from the performance, is to think that his task is finished! He has been drawing near to God with his *lips*, while his *heart* was far from him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when

(to borrow the expression of an old woman here) he is *dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief.*

The like may be said of reading the Scripture. He believes it to be the Word of God; he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Yet, while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day—he cannot do as he would! It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged, than when reading a pamphlet. Here again his *privilege* frequently dwindles into a *task*. His appetite is vitiated, so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the person and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Glad he is, indeed—of those occasions which recall the Savior to his mind; and with this view, notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon the ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would! Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow-creatures, he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting him out of our thoughts, of whom we say, *He is the Beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion.* What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could, we would set him always before us; his love would be the delightful theme of our hearts, *from morn to noon—from noon to dewy eve.*

But though we aim at this good—evil is present with us! We find we are *renewed but in part*, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, *To take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.*

He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of Divine Providence. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God—and the good of those who fear him. He does not doubt that the hairs of his head are all numbered; that the blessings of every kind which he possesses, were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him, by the bounty and special favor of the Lord whom he serves—that afflictions spring not out of the ground—but are fruits and tokens of Divine love, no less than his comforts; that there is a need-be, whenever for a season, he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt, than of what he sees with his eyes! And there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often, when he aims to apply them in an hour of present distress—he cannot do what he would! He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not, he is ready to complain, murmur, and despond! Alas! how vain is man in his best estate! how much weakness and inconsistency even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! and what reason have we to confess, that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants!

It were easy to enlarge in this way, would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God, we are not under the *law*—but under *grace*. And even these distressing effects of the *remnants of indwelling sin*, are over-ruled for good. By these experiences the believer is weaned more from self, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely

to rely on him, who is appointed as our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. **The more vile we are in our own eyes—the more precious Christ will be to us!** A deep repeated sense of the *evil of our hearts*, is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation to Christ—where it is due.

Again, a sense of these evils will (when hardly anything else can do it) reconcile us to the thoughts of *death*; yes, make us desirous to depart, that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep-rooted in our nature, that (like the leprous house) the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement. Then, and not until then—we shall be able to do the thing that we would! When we see Jesus, we shall be transformed into his image, and be done with sin and sorrow forever!

forever!

LETTER 5

March, 1772

Dear sir,

My last letter turned upon the Apostle's thought, Gal. 5:17, "You cannot do the things that you would." In the parallel place, Romans 7:19, there is another clause subjoined, "The evil *evil* I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." This, added to the former, would complete the *dark side of my experience*. Permit me to tell you a little part (for some things *must* not, *cannot* be told), not of what I have *read*—but of what I have *felt*, in illustration of this passage.

I would not be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and evil imaginations, but this evil is present with me. My heart is like a highway, like a city without walls or gates! Nothing is so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid—but it can obtain access to my heart—at any time, or in any place! Neither the study, the pulpit, nor even the Lord's table, exempt me from their intrusion! I sometimes compare my *words* to the treble of an instrument, which my *thoughts* accompany with a kind of bass, or rather anti-bass, in which every rule of harmony is broken, every possible combination of discord and confusion is introduced, utterly inconsistent with, and contradictory to, the intended melody. Ah! what music would my praying and preaching often make in the ears of the Lord Almighty, if he listened to them as they are mine only! By men, the upper part only (if I may so speak) is heard; and small cause there is for self-gratulation, if they should happen to commend, when conscience tells me that they would be struck with astonishment and abhorrence could they but hear the whole!

But if this awful effect of *heart depravity* cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature. Yet, at least, I would not allow and indulge it; yet this I find I do. In defiance of my best judgment, and best wishes, I find *something within me* which nourishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to startle and flee, as I would if a loathsome toad or a serpent was put in my food, or in my bed. Ah! how vile must the heart (at least *my heart*) be—which can hold a parley with such abominations, when I so well know their nature and their tendency! Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, with out the least affectation of humility, (however fair his *outward* conduct appears) subscribe himself *less than the least of all saints—the very chief of sinners!*

I would not be influenced by a principle of SELF on any occasion; yet this evil I often do. I see the baseness and absurdity of such a conduct, as clearly as I see the light of the day. I do not affect to be thought *ten feet tall*, and I know that a desire of *being thought wise or good*, is equally contrary to reason and truth. I would be grieved or angry if my fellow-creatures supposed I had such a desire; and therefore I fear the very principle of SELF, of which I complain, has a considerable share in prompting my desires to conceal it. The **pride** of others often offends me, and makes me studious to hide my own; because their good opinion of me depends much upon their not perceiving it. But the Lord knows how this *dead fly* taints and spoils my best services, and makes them no better than *gilded sins!*

I would not indulge vain reasoning concerning the counsels, ways, and providences of God; yet I am prone to do it. That the Judge of all the earth will do right—is to me as evident and necessary as that two plus two make four. I believe that he has a sovereign right to do what he will with his own, and that this *sovereignty* is but another name for the unlimited exercise of wisdom and goodness. But my reasoning are often such, as if I had never heard of these principles, or had formally renounced them! I feel the workings of a presumptuous spirit, that would account for everything, and venture to dispute whatever it cannot comprehend. What an evil is this—for a potsherd of the earth, to contend with its Maker! I do not act thus towards my fellow-creatures; I do not find fault with the decisions of a judge, or the dispositions of a general, because, though I know they are fallible—yet I suppose they are wiser in their respective departments than myself. But I am often ready to take this liberty with God—when it is most unreasonable and inexcusable!

I would not cleave to a *covenant of works*; it should seem from the foregoing particulars, and many others which I could mention, that I

have reasons enough to deter me from this. Yet even this I do. Not but that I say, and I hope from my heart, *Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord*. I embrace it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—and it is the main pleasure and business of my life, to set forth the necessity and all-sufficiency of the Mediator between God and man, and to make mention of his righteousness, even of his alone. But here, as in everything else, I find a vast difference between my *judgment* and my *experience*. I am invited to take the *water of life freely*—yet often discouraged, because I have nothing with which to *pay* for it.

If I am at times favored with some liberty from the above-mentioned evils, it rather gives me a more favorable opinion of myself, than increases my admiration of the Lord's goodness to so unworthy a creature! And when the returning tide of my corruptions convinces me that I am still the same, an unbelieving *legal* spirit would urge me to conclude that the Lord is changed! At least, I feel a weariness of being indebted to him for such continued multiplied forgiveness; and I fear that some part of my striving against sin, and my desires after an increase of sanctification, arises from a secret wish that I might not be so absolutely and entirely indebted to him.

This is only a *faint sketch of my heart*—it would require a *volume*, rather than a *letter*, to fill up the outlines. But I believe you will not regret that I choose to say no more upon such a subject. But though my disease is *grievous*, it is not *desperate*; I have a gracious and infallible Physician! I shall not die—but live, and declare the works of the Lord!

Seriously Engaged about Trifles

November, 1775

Dear sir,

In the midst of the hurries and changes of this unsettled state—we glide along swiftly towards an unchangeable world; and shall soon have as little connection with the scenes we are now passing through, as we have with what happened before the Flood! All which appears great and interesting in the present life, abstracted from its influence upon our internal character, and our everlasting destiny—will soon be as unreal as a dream of the night. This we know and confess; but, though our *judgments* are convinced, it is seldom that our *hearts* are duly affected by the thought. And while I find it easy to write in this moralizing strain, I feel myself disposed to be *seriously engaged about trifles*—and *trifling in the most serious concerns*—as if I believed the very contrary!

It is with good reason the Lord challenges as his own prerogative, the full knowledge of the deceitfulness, desperate wickedness, and latent depths of the human heart, which is capable of making even his own people so shamefully inconsistent with themselves, and with their acknowledged principles.

I find that, when I have something agreeable in expectation, that my **imagination** paints and prepares the scene beforehand, hurries me over the intervening space of time, as though it were a useless blank, and anticipates the pleasure I propose. Many of my thoughts of this kind are mere waking dreams; for perhaps the opportunity I am eagerly waiting for, never happens—but is swallowed up by some unforeseen disappointment; or if not, something from within or without prevents its answering the idea I had formed of it.

Nor does my imagination confine itself within the narrow limits of *probabilities*; it can busy itself as eagerly in ranging after dreams and impossibilities, and engage my attention to the ideal pursuit of things which are never likely to happen. In these respects *my imagination travels with wings*; so that if the wildness, the multiplicity, the variety of the *phantoms* which pass through my mind in the space of a winter's day, were known to my fellow-creatures, they would probably deem me, as I am often ready to deem myself—but a more sober and harmless kind of lunatic!

But if I endeavor to put this active, roving power in a right track, and to represent to myself those scenes, which, though not yet present, I know will soon be realized, and have a greatness which the most enlarged exercise of my powers cannot comprehend. But if I would fix my thoughts upon the hour of death, the end of the world, the coming of the omniscient Judge, or similar subjects—then my imagination is presently tame, cold, and jaded, travels very slowly, and is soon wearied in the road of truth; though in the *fairy fields of uncertainty and folly* it can skip from mountain to mountain!

Mr. Addison supposes, that the *imagination alone*, as it can be differently affected, is capable of making us either inconceivably happy, or inconceivably miserable. I am sure it is capable of making us miserable, though I believe it seldom gives us much pleasure—but such as is to be found in a *fool's paradise!* But I am sure, that were my outward life and conduct perfectly free from blame, the *disorders* and *defilement* of my imagination are sufficient to constitute me a chief sinner, in the sight of Him to whom the *thoughts* and *intents* of the heart are continually open—and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity!

Upon this head I cannot but lament how universally, almost, **education** is suited, and as it were designed—to add to the stimulus of depraved nature. A cultivated imagination is commended and sought after as a very desirable talent, though it seldom means more than the possession of a large stock of other people's dreams and fables, with a certain quickness in compounding them, enlarging upon them, and exceeding them by inventions of our own. Poets, painters, and even historians, are employed to assist us, from our early years—in forming an habitual relish for *shadows* and *colorings*, which both indispose for the *search of truth*, and even unfit its for its reception, unless proposed just in our own way!

The best effect of the *Belles Letters* upon the imagination, seems generally expressed by the word *Taste*. And what is this *taste*—but a certain disposition which loves to be humored, soothed, and flattered, and which can hardly receive or bear the most important truths, if they are not decorated and set off with such a delicacy and address, as taste requires? I say the most important truths; because truths of a *secular* importance strike so closely upon the senses, that the decision of taste perhaps is not waited for.

Thus, if a man is informed of the birth of his child, or that his house is on fire, the message takes up his thoughts, and he is seldom much disgusted with the *manner* in which it is delivered. But what an insuperable bar is the refined taste of many, to their profiting by the preaching of the Gospel, or even to their hearing it? Though the subject of a gospel discourse is weighty, and some just representation given of the evil of sin, the worth of the soul, and the love of Christ; yet, if there is something amiss in the elocution, language, or manner of the preacher, people of taste must be possessed, in a good measure, of grace likewise—if they can hear him with tolerable patience. And perhaps three fourths of those who are accounted the

most sensible and judicious in the auditory, will remember little about the sermon—but the tone of the voice, the awkwardness of the attitude, the obsolete expressions, and the like; while the poor and simple, not being encumbered with this *hurtful accomplishment*, receive the messenger as the Lord's servant, and the truth as the Lord's Word, and are comforted and edified.

But I stop. Some people would say, that I must suppose you to have but little taste, or else much grace, or I should not venture to trouble you with such letters as mine.

The Plan of Salvation

December 8, 1775.

My Dear Friend,

Are you willing that I should still call you so, or are you quite weary of me? Your silence makes me suspect the latter. However, it is my part to fulfill my promise, and then leave the event to God. As I have but an imperfect remembrance of what I have already written, I may be liable to some repetitions. I cannot stay to comment upon every line in your letter—but I proceed to notice such passages as seem most to affect the subject in debate. When you speak of the Scripture's maintaining one consistent sense, which, if it is the Word of God, it certainly must do, you say you read and understand it in this one consistent sense; nay, you cannot remember the time when you did not.

It is otherwise with me, and with multitudes; we remember when it was a sealed book; and we are sure it would have been so still, had not the Holy Spirit opened our understandings. But when you add,

"Though I pretend not to understand the whole—yet what I do understand appears perfectly consistent;" I know not how far this exception may extend; for perhaps the reason why you allow you do not understand some parts, is because you cannot make them consistent with the *sense* you put upon other parts. You quote my words, "That when we are conscious of our depravity, reasoning stands us in no stead." Undoubtedly reason always will stand rational creatures in some stead; but my meaning is, that, when we are deeply convinced of sin, all our former reasoning upon the ways of God, while we made our conceptions the standard by which we judge what is befitting Him to do, as if He were altogether such an one as ourselves—all those cobweb reasonings are swept away, and we submit to him without reasoning, though not without reason—for we have the strongest reason imaginable to acknowledge ourselves vile and lost, without righteousness and strength, when we actually feel ourselves to be so.

You speak of the Gospel *terms* of justification. The term is *faith*, Mar. 16:16; Act. 13:39; the Gospel propounds, admits, no other term. But this *faith*, as I endeavored to show in my former letter, is very different from *rational assent*. You speak likewise of the law of faith; by which, if you mean what some call the remedial law, which we are to obey as well as we can, and such obedience, together with our faith, will entitle us to acceptance with God—I am persuaded the Scripture speaks of no such thing. Grace, and works of any kind, in the point of acceptance with God—are mentioned by the Apostle not only as opposites, or contraries—but as absolutely contradictory to each other, like fire and water, light and darkness; so that the affirmation of one—is the denial of the other; Romans 4:5, and Romans 11:6. God justifies freely, justifies the ungodly, and him who works not. Though justifying faith is indeed an active principle, it works by love; yet not for acceptance. Those whom the Apostle

exhorts "to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling," he considers as justified already; for he considers them as believers, in whom he supposed God had already begun a good work; and, if so, was confident that God would accomplish it; Phi. 1:6.

To them, the consideration that God (who dwells in the hearts of believers) wrought in them to will and to do, was a powerful motive and encouragement to them to work; that is, to give all diligence in his appointed means. As a right sense of the sin that dwells in us, and the snares and temptations around us, will teach us still to work with fear and trembling.

You suppose a difference between Christians (so called) who are devoted to God in baptism, and those who in the first ages were converted from abominable superstitions and idolatrous vices. It is true, in Christian countries we do not worship Heathen divinities; and this is the principal difference I can find. Neither reason nor observation will allow me to think that human nature is a whit better now, than it was in the Apostle's time. I know no kinds or degrees of wickedness which prevailed among Heathens, which are not prevalent among *nominal Christians*, who have perhaps been baptized in their infancy; and therefore, as the streams in the life are equally worldly, sensual, devilish—I doubt not but the fountain in the heart is equally polluted and poisonous. It is as equally true, as in the days of Christ and his Apostles, that unless a man is born again—he cannot see the kingdom of God.

You sent me a sermon upon the new birth, or regeneration, and you have several of mine on the same subject. I wish you to compare them with each other, and with the Scripture; and I pray God to show you wherein the difference consists, and on which side the truth lies.

When you desire me to reconcile God's being the *author of sin* with his justice, you show that you misunderstand the whole strain of my sentiments; for I am persuaded you would not misrepresent them. It is easy to charge harsh consequences, which I neither allow, nor indeed do they follow from my sentiments. God cannot be the *author of sin*, in that sense you would fix upon me; but is it possible that upon your plan you find no difficulty in what the Scripture teaches us upon this subject? I conceive, that those who were concerned in the death of Christ were very great sinners, and that in nailing him to the cross they committed atrocious wickedness. Yet, if the Apostle may be believed—all this was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, Act. 2:23; and they did no more than what His hand and purpose had determined should be done, Act. 4:28. And you will observe, that this wicked act (wicked with respect to the perpetrators) was not only permitted—but foreordained, in the strongest and most absolute sense of the word.

The glory of God and the salvation of men, depended upon its being done, and just in that manner and with all those circumstances which actually took place; and yet Judas and the rest acted freely, and the wickedness was properly their own. Now, my friend, the arguments which satisfy you that the Scripture does not represent God as the author of this sin in this appointment, will plead for me at the same time; and when you think you easily overcome me by asking, "Can God be the author of sin?" your imputation falls as directly upon the Word of God himself.

God is no more the author of sin, than the sun is the cause of ice; but it is in the nature of water to congeal into ice when the sun's influence is *suspended* to a certain degree. So there is sin enough in the hearts of men to make the earth the very image of hell, and to prove that men are no better than incarnate devils—were he to

suspend his influence and restraint. Sometimes, and in some instances, he is pleased to suspend it considerably; and so far as he does, human nature quickly appears in its true colors.

Objections of this kind have been repeated and refuted before either you or I were born; and the Apostle evidently supposes they would be urged against his doctrine, when he obviates the question, "Why does he yet find fault? Who has resisted his will?" To which he gives no other answer than by referring it to God's sovereignty, and the power which a potter has over the clay.

I acknowledge that I am fallible; yet I must again lay claim to a certainty about the way of salvation. I am as sure of some things—as of my own existence! However, my sentiments are confirmed by the testimonies of thousands who have lived before me, of many with whom I have personally conversed in different places and circumstances, unknown to each other; yet all have received the same views—because taught by the same Spirit. And I have likewise been greatly confirmed by the testimony of many with whom I have conversed in their dying hours. I have seen them rejoicing in the prospect of death, free from fears, breathing the air of immortality; heartily disclaiming their duties and performances; acknowledging that their best actions were attended with evil sufficient to condemn them; renouncing every shadow of hope—but what they derived from the blood of Christ, as the sole cause of their acceptance; yet triumphing in him over every enemy and fear, and as sure of heaven as if they were already there!

Such were the Apostle's hopes, wholly founded on knowing whom he had believed, and his persuasion of his ability to keep that which he had committed unto him. This is faith, a renouncing of everything we are apt to call our own, and relying wholly upon the blood,

righteousness, and intercession of Jesus. However, I cannot communicate this *my certainty* to you; I only tell you there is such a thing, in hopes, if you do not think I willfully lie both to God and man, you will be earnest to seek it from him who bestowed it on me, and who will bestow it upon all who will sincerely apply to him, and patiently wait upon him for it.

I cannot but wonder, that, while you profess to believe the *depravity of human nature*, you should speak of *good qualities inherent* in it. The Word of God describes it as evil, only evil, and that continually. "The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" Jeremiah 17:9. That there are such qualities as Stoics and infidels call *virtue*, I allow. God has not left man destitute of such dispositions as are necessary to the peace of society; but I deny there is any spiritual goodness in them, unless it is founded in a supreme love to God, has his glory for their aim, and is produced by faith in Jesus Christ. A man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned in zeal for the truth, and yet be a mere nothing, a tinkling cymbal, in the sight of Him who sees not as man sees—but judges the heart. Many infidels and avowed enemies to the Grace and Gospel of Christ, have made a fair show of what the world call *virtue*; but Christian virtue is grace, the effect of a new nature and new life; and works thus wrought in God are as different from the faint, partial imitations of them which fallen nature is capable of producing, as a living man is different from a statue! A statue may express the features and lineaments of the person whom it represents—but there is no life!

Your comment on the seventh to the Romans, latter part, contradicts my feelings. You are either of a different make and nature from me, or else you are not rightly apprised of your own state, if you do not find the Apostle's complaints very suitable to yourself. I believe it

applicable to the most holy Christian upon earth. But controversies of this kind are worn thread-bare. When you speak of the spiritual part of a natural man, it sounds to me like the *living* part of a *dead* man, or the *seeing* part of a *blind* man! Paul tells me, that the natural man (whatever his *spiritual* part may be) can neither receive nor discern the things of God. What the Apostle speaks of himself in Romans 7, is no more, when rightly understood, than what he affirms of all who are partakers of a spiritual life, or who are true believers, Gal. 5:17.

The carnal, natural mind—is enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. When you subjoin, "Until it be set at liberty from the law of sin," you do not comment upon the text—but make an addition of your own, which the text will by no means bear. The carnal mind is enmity. An *enemy* may be reconciled; but *enmity* itself is incurable. This *carnal mind, natural man, old man, flesh*—are all equivalent expressions, and denote and include the heart of man as he is by nature. This cannot be sanctified.

All that is godly or gracious in a person—is the effect of a new creation, a supernatural principle, wrought in the heart by the Gospel of Christ, and the agency of his Spirit; and until that is effected, the highest attainments, the finest qualifications in man, however they may exalt him in his own eyes, or recommend him to the notice of his fellow-worms, are but abominations in the sight of God! Luke 16:15. The Gospel is calculated and designed—to stain the pride of human glory. It is provided, not for the wise and the self-righteous, for those who think they have good hearts and good works to plead—but for the guilty, the helpless, the wretched, for those who are ready to perish; it fills the hungry with good things—but it sends the rich empty away! See Rev. 3:17-18.

You ask, If man can do nothing without an extraordinary impulse from God—is he to sit still and careless? By no means! I am far from saying man can do nothing, though I believe he cannot open his own spiritual eyes, or give himself faith. I wish every man to abstain carefully from sinful company and sinful actions, to read the Bible, to pray to God for His heavenly teaching. For this waiting upon God, he has a moral ability; and if he perseveres thus in seeking, the promise is sure, that he shall not seek in vain. But I would not have him mistake the *means* for the *end*; think himself *good* because he is preserved from gross vices and follies; or trust to his religious course of duties for acceptance with God; nor be satisfied until Christ is revealed in him, formed within him, dwells in his heart by faith, and until he can say, upon good grounds, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I—but Christ lives in me!" I need not tell you these are Scriptural expressions; I am persuaded, if they were not, they would be exploded by many as unintelligible jargon.

True faith unites the soul to Christ—and thereby gives access to God, and fills it with a *peace* passing understanding, a living *hope*, a *joy* unspeakable and full of glory. True faith teaches us that we are weak in ourselves—but enables us to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. To those who thus believe, Christ is precious! He is their beloved; they hear and know his voice; the very sound of his name gladdens their hearts; and he manifests himself to them as he does not to the world. Thus the Scriptures speak, thus the first Christians experienced; and this is precisely the language which in our days is despised as enthusiasm and folly.

For it is now as it was then, though these things are revealed to babes, and they are as sure of them as that they see the noon-day sun—they are hidden from the wise and prudent, until the Lord makes them willing to renounce their own wisdom, and to become fools,

that they may be truly wise, 1Co. 1:18-19; 1Co. 3:8; 1Co. 8:2. Attention to the *education of children* is an undoubted duty; and it is a mercy when it so far succeeds as to preserve them from gross wickedness; but it will not change the heart! Those who receive Christ are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man—but of God! John 1:13.

If a man *professes* to love the Lord Jesus, I am willing to believe him, if he does not give me proof to the contrary; but I am sure, at the same time, no one can love him, in the Scriptural sense, who does not know the need and the worth of a Savior; in other words, who is not brought, as a ruined helpless sinner, to live upon him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Those who love him thus, will speak highly of him, and acknowledge that he is their all in all. And those who thus love him, and speak of him, will get little thanks for their pains in such a world as this: "All who live godly in Christ Jesus—must suffer persecution." The world which hated him—will hate them. And though it is possible by his grace to put to silence, in some measure, the ignorance of foolish men; and though his providence can protect his people, so that not a hair of their heads can be hurt without his permission; yet the world will show their teeth—even if they are not allowed to bite.

"You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane!" Acts 26:24. "What is this babbler trying to say?" Acts 17:18. The Apostles were accounted as *foolish babblers*. I need not point out to you the force of these expressions. We are no better than the Apostles; nor have we reason to expect much better treatment—so far as we walk in their steps. On the other hand, there is a way of speaking of God, and goodness, and benevolence, and morality—which the world will bear well enough. But if we preach Christ as the only way of salvation, lay open the horrid evils of the human heart,

tell our hearers that they are dead in trespasses and sins, and have no better ground of hope in themselves than the vilest malefactors; if we tell the virtuous and decent, as well as the profligate, that unless they are born again, and made partakers of living faith, and count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ—that they cannot be saved—this is the message they cannot bear! We shall be called knaves or fools, uncharitable bigots, and twenty harsh names! If you have met with no treatment like this—you should suspect whether you have yet received the right key to the doctrines of Christ; for, depend upon it—the offense of the cross is not ceased!

I am grieved and surprised that you seem to take little notice of anything in the account of my deceased friend—but his wishing himself to be a Deist, and his having play-books about him in his illness. As to the plays, they were Shakespeare's, which, as a man of taste, it is no great wonder he should sometimes look at. Your remark on the other point shows that you are not much acquainted with the exercises of the human mind under certain circumstances. I believe I observed formerly, that it was not a libertine wish. Had you known him, you would have known one of the most amiable and unblemished characters. Few were more beloved and admired for an uniform course of integrity, moderation, and benevolence; but he was discouraged. He studied the Bible; believed it in general to be the Word of God; but his wisdom, his strong turn for reasoning, stood so in his way, that he could get no solid comfort from it. He felt the vanity of the schemes proposed by many men admired in the world as teachers of divinity; and he felt the vanity likewise of his own. He was also a minister, and had a sincere design of doing good. He wished to reform the profligate, and comfort the afflicted, by his preaching; but as he was not acquainted with that one kind of preaching which God owns to the edification of the hearers, he found he could do neither. A sense of disappointments of this kind

distressed him. Finding in himself none of that peace which the Scripture speaks of, and none of the influence he hoped for attending his ministry, he was led sometimes to question the truth of the Scripture.

We have a spiritual enemy always near, to press upon a mind in this despondent situation: nor am I surprised that he should then wish himself a Deist; since, if there were any hope for a sinner but by faith in the blood of Jesus, he had as much of his own goodness to depend upon, as most I have known. As for the rest, if you could see nothing admirable and wonderful in the clearness, the dignity, the spirituality of his expressions, after the Lord revealed the Gospel to him, I can only say, I am sorry for it. This I know—that some people of sense, taste, learning, and reason, and far enough from my sentiments, have been greatly struck with them.

You say a death-bed repentance is what you would be sorry to give any hope of. My dear friend, it is well for poor sinners that God's thoughts and ways are as much above men's, as the heavens are higher than the earth. We agreed to communicate our sentiments freely, and promised not to be offended with each other's freedom, if we could help it. I am afraid of offending you by a thought just now upon my mind, and yet I dare not in conscience suppress it. I must therefore venture to say, that I hope those who depend upon such a repentance as your scheme points out, will repent of their repentance itself upon their death-bed at least, if not sooner.

You and I, perhaps, would have encouraged the fair-spoken young man, who said he had kept all the commandments from his youth—and would have left the thief upon the cross to perish like a villain, as he lived. But Jesus thought differently. I do not encourage sinners to defer their repentance to their death-beds; I press the necessity of a

repentance this moment! But then I take care to tell them, that repentance is the gift of God; that Jesus is exalted to bestow it; and that all their endeavors that way, unless they seek to him for grace, will be vain as washing a black-man, and transient as washing a swine—which will soon return to the mire again!

I know the evil heart will abuse the grace of God; the Apostle knew this likewise, Romans 3:8, and Romans 6:8; but this did not tempt him to suppress the glorious grace of the Gospel, the power of Jesus to save to the uttermost, and his merciful promise, that whoever comes unto him, he will never cast out. The repentance of a natural heart, proceeding wholly from fear, like that of some malefactors, who are sorry—not that they have committed robbery or murder—but that they must be hanged for it! This kind of repentance, undoubtedly, is worth nothing, whether in time of health, or in a dying hour. But that gracious change of heart, views, and dispositions, which always takes place when Jesus is made known to the soul as having died that the sinner might live, and been wounded that he might be healed; this, at whatever period God is pleased to afford and effect it by his Spirit, brings a sure and everlasting salvation with it.

Still I find I have not done: you ask my exposition of the parables of the Talents and Pounds; but at present I can write no more. I have only just time to tell you, that when I begged your acceptance of my book, *Omicron*, nothing was farther from my expectation than a correspondence with you. The frank and kind manner in which you wrote, presently won upon my heart. In the course of our letters, I observed an integrity and unselfishness in you, which endeared you to me still more. Since then, our debates have taken a much more interesting turn. I have considered it as a call, and an opportunity put in my hand, by the especial providence of Him who rules over all.

I have embraced the occasion to lay before you simply, and rather in a way of testimony than argumentation, what (in the main) I am sure is truth. I have done enough to discharge my conscience—but shall never think I do enough to answer the affection I bear you. I have done enough likewise to make you weary of my correspondence, unless it should please God to fix the subject deeply upon your mind, and make you attentive to the possibility and vast importance of a mistake in matters of everlasting concernment.

I pray that the Spirit of God may guide you into all truth. He only is the effectual teacher. I still retain a cheerful hope, that some things you can not at present receive—will be hereafter the joy and comfort of your heart: but I know it cannot be—until the Lord's own time. I cannot promise to give such long answers as your letters require, to clear up every text that may be proposed, and to answer every objection that may be started; yet I shall be glad to exchange a letter now and then. At present it remains with you, whether our correspondence continues or not, as this is the third letter I have written since I heard from you, and therefore must be the last until I do. I would think what remains might be better settled in person; for which purpose I shall be glad to see you, or ready to wait on you when leisure will permit, and when I know it will be agreeable. But *if* (as life and all its affairs are precarious) we should never meet in this world, I pray God we may meet at the right hand of Jesus, in the great day, when he shall come to gather up his jewels, and to judge the world! There is an endless diversity of opinions in matters of religion—which of them are right and safe, and will lead to eternal glory. I am still in a manner lost amidst more engagements than I have time to comply with; but I feel and know that I am, etc.

Questions on Salvation

November 17, 1775.

My dear Friend,

At length I take up your letter of August 14, with design to give a more explicit answer. My delaying hitherto has been unavoidable; I am sorry to have your patience put to so long a trial; and would be more sorry—but that I consider, that in my former papers, sermons, *Omicron's Letters*, etc. you already possess the whole (in substance) of what I have to offer. My present part is but to repeat what I have elsewhere expressed, only with some *variety* and *enlargement*.

You yourself well state the situation of our debate, when you say, "Nor in truth do you offer any arguments to convince me, nor does it seem very consistent on your grounds so to do. And if this important change is to be brought about by the intervention of some extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit, and cannot be brought about without it—I do not see anything farther that I have to do, than to keep my mind as much unbiased as I can, and to wait and pray for it."

I think my letter from London was to the purpose of these your own words, though you seemed dissatisfied with it. While *we see through a different medium*, it will be easy for you to answer every text I might adduce in support of my sentiments, as you have those I have already brought, "That you understand them otherwise." In order to support my sense of one text, I could perhaps quote and argue from twenty more, and still "You would understand them otherwise." The life of man, yes of Methuselah, would hardly suffice to prove and defend all that might be alleged on both sides in this way; and at last we would leave off as we began, more fully confirmed in our own opinions—unless the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, should be pleased to

show the person who maintained the wrong side of the argument, where his mistake lay. However, I mean to take some notice of your queries as they offer themselves.

The first which occurs is complicated. The substance I think is, whether such belief and aims as you possess will stand you in no stead, unless you likewise believe irresistible grace, absolute predestination, etc. You may have observed, I have several times waived speaking about predestination or election—not that I am ashamed of the doctrine, because, if it indeed is absurd, shocking, and unjust—the blame will not deservedly fall upon me, for I did not invent it—but upon the Scriptures, where I am sure it is laid down in as plain terms—as that God created the heavens and the earth.

I cannot but wonder, that people professing any reverence for the Bible, should so openly and strongly declare their abhorrence of what the Bible so expressly teaches—namely, that there is a election of people by the grace and good pleasure of God—where by nature there is no difference; and that all things respecting the salvation of these people is infallibly secured by a Divine predestination.

I do not offer this as a *rational* doctrine (though it be highly so to me)—but it is *Scriptural*, or else the Scripture is a mere nose of wax, and without a determinate meaning. What ingenuity is needful to interpret many passages in a sense more favorable to our natural prejudices against God's sovereignty! Mat. 11:25-26, and Mat. 13:10-17; Mar. 13:20-22; John 17; John 10:26; Romans 8:28-30, and Romans 9:13-24, and Romans 11:7; Eph. 1:4-5; 1 Pe. 1:2. Were I fond of disputing, as I am not, I think I could put a close reasoner hard to it, to maintain the truth of Scripture prophecies, or the belief of a particular providence, unless he would admit a Divine predestination of causes and events as the ground of his arguments. However, as I

said, I have chosen to waive the point; because, however true and necessary in itself, the knowledge and comprehension of it is not necessary to the being of a true Christian, though I can hardly conceive he can be an established, consistent believer without it.

This doctrine is not the turning point between you and I. The nature of justification, and the method of a sinner's acceptance with God, are of much more immediate importance; and therefore, if I am to speak plainly, I must say, that I look upon your present sentiments, attainments, and advances, as you describe them, to constitute that kind of gain the Apostle speaks of, and concerning which I hope you will one day be of his mind, and be glad to account it all loss, that you may win Christ, and be found in him, "not having your own righteousness, which is of the law—but the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phi. 3:4, Phi. 3:7-10.

For, as you tell me, that you never remember a time when you were not conscious before God of great unworthiness, and intervals of earnest endeavors to serve him, though not with the same success—yet something in the same way as at present; this is but saying, in other words, you never remember a time when old things passed away, and all things became new—and yet the Apostle insists much upon this, 2Co. 4:6, and 2Co. 5:17.

The convictions of natural conscience, and those which are wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, are different, not only in degree—but in kind; the light of a glow-worm and of the sun do not more essentially differ. The former are partial and superficial, leave us in possession of a supposed power of our own, are pacified by some appearances of an outward change, and make us no further sensible of the necessity of a Savior than to make our doings and duties (if I

may so express myself) full weight, which perhaps might otherwise be a little deficient when brought to the balances of the sanctuary.

But truly spiritual convictions give us far other views of sin—they lead us to a deep and solemn consideration of the root, our total absolute depravity, and our utter apostasy from God, by which we are incapable of doing good, as a dead man is of performing the functions of life! They lead us to the rule and standard—the strict, holy, inflexible law of God, which reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart; requires perfect, universal, persevering obedience; denounces a curse upon every failure, Gal. 3:10; and affords neither place nor strength for repentance. Thus they sweep away every hope and refuge we had before, and fix upon us a sense of guilt and condemnation, from which there is no relief, until we can look to Jesus, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent—which was not to give efficacy to medicines and plasters of their own application—but to heal them completely of itself by looking at it! John 3:14-15, and John 6:40; Isa. 43:22.

You wish me to explain my distinction between *faith* and *rational assent*; and though I know no two things in the world more clearly distinct in themselves, or more expressly distinguished in Scripture—yet I fear I may not easily make it appear to you. You allow faith, in your sense, to be the gift of God; but, in my sense, it is likewise wrought by the operation of God, Col. 2:12, and the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. Eph. 1:19. It is that same energy of the power of his strength, by which the dead body of Jesus was raised from the dead. Can these strong expressions intend no more than a rational assent, such as we give to a proposition in Euclid? I believe fallen reason is, of itself, utterly incapable even of assenting to the great truths of Revelation; it may assent to the terms in which they

are proposed—but it must put its own interpretation upon them, or it would despise them. The natural man can neither receive nor discern the things of God. And if any one would be wise, the Apostle's first advice to him is, "Let him become a fool, that he may be wise; for the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God."

Indeed, when the heart is changed, and the mind enlightened; then reason is sanctified, and, if I may so say, baptized. It renounces its curious disquisitions, and is content humbly to tread in the path of Revelation. This is one difference: assent may be the act of our natural reason; but faith is the effect of immediate Almighty power.

Another difference is, Faith is always efficacious. Whereas assent is often given where it has little or no influence upon the conduct. Thus, for instance, everyone will assent to this truth, *All men are mortal*. Yet the greatest part of mankind, though they readily *assent* to the proposition, and it would be highly irrational to do otherwise, *live* as they might do—if the reverse were true! But those who have Divine faith, feel, as well as say, that they are pilgrims and sojourners upon earth.

Again: faith gives peace of conscience, access to God, and a sure evidence and subsistence of things not seen; Romans 5:1-2; Heb. 11:1 : where as a calm, dispassionate reasoner may be compelled to assent to the external arguments in favor of Christianity, and yet remain a total stranger to that communion with God, that Spirit of adoption, that foretaste of glory—which is the privilege and portion of believers.

So likewise, faith overcomes the world, which rational assent will not do. To sum up all in a word, "He who believes shall be saved!" But surely many who give a *rational assent* to the Gospel, live and die in those sins which exclude from the kingdom of God, Gal. 5:19-21.

Faith is the effect of a principle of new life implanted in the soul, that was before dead in trespasses and sins; and it qualifies, not only for obeying the Savior's precepts—but chiefly and primarily for receiving from and rejoicing in his fullness, admiring his love, his work, his person, his glory, his advocacy. Faith makes Christ precious; enthrones him in the heart; presents him as the most delightful object to our meditations—as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and strength; our root, head, life, shepherd, and husband. These are all Scriptural expressions and images, setting forth, so far as words can declare—what Jesus is in himself and to his believing people.

But how cold is the comment which *rational assent* puts upon very many passages, wherein the Apostle Paul endeavors (but in vain) to express the fullness of his heart upon this subject! A most valued friend of mine, a Clergyman now living, had for many years given a rational assent to the Gospel. He labored with much earnestness upon your plan; was very exemplary in his whole conduct; preached almost incessantly (two or three times every day, for years), having a parish in the remote parts of Yorkshire, of great extent, and containing five or six different hamlets at some distance from each other. He succeeded likewise with his people so far as to break them off from outward irregularities; and was mentioned, in a letter to the Society for propagating the Gospel (which I have seen in print) as the most perfect example of a parish pastor which this nation, or perhaps this age, has produced. Thus he went on for many years, teaching his people what he knew, for he could teach them no more. One day, reading Ephes. 3 in his Greek Testament, his thoughts were stopped by the a word in Eph. 3:8. He was struck, and led to think with himself to this purpose: The Apostle, when speaking of the love and riches of Christ, uses remarkable expressions; he speaks of heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, and unsearchables, where I

seem to find everything plain, easy, and rational. He finds mysteries where I can perceive none. Surely, though I use the words Gospel, faith, and grace, with him—my ideas of them must be different from his. This led him to a close examination of all His Epistles, and, by the blessing of God, brought on a total change in his views and preaching. He no longer set his people to keep a law of faith; to trust in their sincerity and endeavors, upon some general hope that Christ would help them out where they came short; but he preached Christ himself, as the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes. He felt himself, and labored to convince others, that there is no hope for a sinner but merely in the blood of Jesus; and no possibility of his doing any works acceptable to God, until he himself is first made accepted in the Beloved. Nor did he labor in vain. Now his preaching effected, not only an outward reformation—but a real change of heart, in very many of his hearers. The word was received, as Paul expresses it, not with a rational assent only—but with demonstration and power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. And their endeavors to observe the Gospel precepts were abundantly more extensive, uniform, and successful, when they were brought to say, with the Apostle, "I am crucified with Christ! Nevertheless I live—yet not I—but Christ lives in me; and the life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God."

Such a change of views and sentiments, I pray God—that you may experience. These things may appear uncouth to you at present, as they have done to many who now bless God for showing them what their reason could never have taught them. My divinity is unfashionable enough at present—but it was not so always; you will find few books, written from the area of the Reformation, until a little before Laud's, that set forth any other. There were few pulpits until after the Restoration from which any other was heard. A lamentable change has indeed since taken place; but God has not left

himself without witnesses. You think, though I disclaim infallibility, I arrogate too much in speaking with so much certainty. I am fallible indeed; but I am sure of the main points of doctrine I hold. I am not in the least doubt, whether salvation is by faith or by works; whether faith is of our own power or of God's operation; whether Christ's obedience, or our own, is the just ground of our hope; whether a man can truly call Jesus Lord—but by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. I have no more hesitation about these points, than I should have were I asked whether it was God or man who created the heavens and the earth!

Besides, as I have more than once observed, your sentiments were once my own; so that I, who have traveled both roads, may have perhaps some stronger reasons to determine which is the right, than you can have, who have only traveled one.

I now come to the two queries you propose, the solution of which you think will clearly mark the difference of our sentiments. The substance of them is,

1st, Whether I think any sinner ever perished in his sins (to whom the Gospel has been preached) because God refused to supply him with such a proportion of his assistance as was absolutely necessary to his believing and repenting; or without his having previously rejected the incitements of his Holy Spirit? A full answer to this would require a sheet. But, briefly, I believe, that, all mankind being corrupt and guilty before God, he might, without impeachment to his justice, have left them all to perish, as we are assured he did the fallen angels. But he has been pleased to show mercy—and mercy must be free. If the sinner has any claim to it—so far it is justice, not mercy. He, who is to be our Judge, assures us, that few find the gate which leads to life, while many throng the road to destruction.

Your question seems to imply, that you think God either did make salvation equally open to all, or that it would have been more becoming his goodness to have done so.

But he is the potter—and we are the clay. His ways and thoughts are above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth. The Judge of all the earth will do right. He has appointed a day, when he will manifest, to the conviction of all—that He has done right. Until then, I hold it best to take things upon his Word, and not too harshly determine what it befits Jehovah to do. Instead of saying what *I* think, let it suffice to remind you of what *Paul* thought, Romans 9:15-21.

But, farther, I say, that unless mercy were afforded to those who are saved, in a way special to themselves, and which is not afforded to those who perish—no one soul could be saved. For fallen man, universally, considered as such, is as incapable of doing the least thing towards his salvation, until saved by the grace of God—as a dead body is of restoring itself to life. Whatever difference takes place between men in this respect, is of grace, that is—of God, undeserved. Yes, his first approaches to our hearts are undesired too; for, until he seeks us, we cannot, we will not seek him, Psa. 110:3. It is in the day of his power, and not before—that his people are made willing.

Where the Gospel is preached, those who perish, do willfully resist the Gospel light, and choose and cleave to darkness, and stifle the convictions which the truths of God, when his true Gospel is indeed preached, will, in one degree or other, force upon their minds. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the love of other things, the violence of sinful appetites, their prejudices, pride, and self-righteousness either prevent the reception, or choke the growth

of the good seed. Thus their own sin and obstinacy is the proper cause of their destruction. They *will* not come to Christ—that they may have eternal life.

At the same time, it is true that they *cannot*, unless they are supernaturally drawn by God; John 5:40; John 6:44. They *will* not and they *cannot* come. Both are equally true, and they are consistent. For a man's *cannot*, is not a *natural* inability—but a *moral* inability. It is not an impossibility in the nature of things, as it is for me to walk upon the water, or to fly in the air—but such an inability as, instead of extenuating, does exceedingly enhance and aggravate his guilt. He is so blinded by Satan, so alienated from God by nature and wicked works, so given up to sin, so averse from that way of salvation which is contrary to his pride and natural wisdom—that he will not embrace it or seek after it! And therefore he cannot receive it, until the grace of God powerfully enlightens his mind, and overcomes his obstacles.

But this brings me to your second query,

II. Do I think that God, in the ordinary course of his providence, grants his assistance in an irresistible manner, or effects faith and conversion without the sinner's own hearty consent and concurrence? I rather choose to term grace *invincible*, than *irresistible*. For it is too often resisted, even by those who believe; but, because it is invincible, it triumphs over all resistance, when God is pleased to bestow it. For the rest, I believe no sinner is converted without his own hearty will and concurrence. But he is not willing—until he is made so. Why does he at all refuse? Because he is insensible of his lost and dreadful condition. He does not know the evil of sin, the strictness of God's law, the majesty of God whom he has offended, nor the total apostasy of his heart! He is blind to

eternity, and ignorant of the excellency of Christ! He thinks that he is whole, and sees not his need of this great Physician! For salvation, he relies upon his own wisdom, power, and supposed righteousness.

Now, in this state of things, when God comes with a purpose of saving mercy, he begins by convincing the person of sin, judgment, and righteousness; causes him to feel and know that he is a lost, condemned, helpless creature; and then reveals to him the necessity, sufficiency, and willingness of Christ to save those who are ready to perish, without money or price, without doings or deserving. Then he sees *faith* to be very different from a *rational assent*; finds that nothing but the power of God can produce a well-grounded hope in the heart of a convinced sinner; therefore looks to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of faith, to enable him to believe. For this he waits in what we call the *means of grace*; he prays, he reads the Word, he thirsts for God as the deer pants for the water-brooks. And, though perhaps for a while he is distressed with many doubts and fears, he is encouraged to wait on, because Jesus has said, "Him who comes unto me, I will never cast out."

The obstinacy of the will remains while the understanding is dark—and ceases when that is enlightened. Suppose a man walking in the dark, where there are pits and precipices of which he is not aware. You are sensible of his danger, and call after him; but he thinks he knows better than you, refuses your advice, and is perhaps angry with you for your importunity. He sees no danger, therefore will not be persuaded there is any. But if you go with a light, get before him, and show him plainly, that if he takes another step, that he will fall to his death—then he will stop of his own accord, blame himself for not minding you before, and be ready to comply with your farther directions. In either case, man's will acts with equal freedom—the difference of his conduct arises from conviction.

Something like this is the case in our spiritual concerns. Sinners are called and warned by the Word; but they are wise in their own eyes, and take but little notice—until the Lord gives them light, which he is not bound to give to any, and therefore cannot be bound to give to all. Those who have it, have reason to be thankful, and subscribe to the Apostle's words, "By grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

I have not yet half done with the first sheet! I shall consider the rest at leisure; but send this as a specimen of my willingness to clear my sentiments to you as far as I can. Unless it should please God to make what I offer satisfactory, I well know before-hand what objections and answers will occur to you; for these points have been often debated; and, after a course of twenty-seven years, in which true religion has been the chief object of my thoughts and inquiries, I am not entirely a stranger to what can be offered on either side. What I write, I write simply and in love; beseeching Him, who alone can set a seal to his own truth, to guide you and bless you. This letter has been more than a week in hand; I have been called from it I suppose ten times, frequently in the middle of a period or a line. My leisure, which before was small, is now reduced almost to nothing. But I am desirous to keep up my correspondence with you, because I feel an affectionate interest in you, and because it pleased God to put it into your heart to apply to me. You cannot think how your first letter struck me—it was so unexpected, and seemed so improbable, that you should open your mind to me, I immediately conceived a hope that it would prove for good. Nor am I yet discouraged.

When you have leisure and inclination—write. I shall be always glad to hear from you, and I will proceed in answering what I have already by me, as fast as I can. But I have many letters now waiting for answers, which must be attended to.

I recommend you to the blessing and care of the great Shepherd; and remain, etc.

That Bitter Root, Indwelling Sin!

April, 1772

Dear sir,

My two last letters turned upon a mournful subject, the depravity of the heart, which impedes us when we would do good, and pollutes our best-intended services with evil. We have cause, upon this account, to go softly all our days—yet we need not sorrow as those who have no hope. The Lord has provided his people, relief under those complaints, and teaches us to draw improvement from them. If the evils we feel were not capable of being over-ruled for good, he would not permit them to remain in us. This we may infer from his *hatred* to sin, and the *love* which he bears to his people.

As to the *remedy*—neither our *state* nor his *honor* are affected by the workings of indwelling sin, in the hearts of those whom he has taught to wrestle, strive, and mourn on account of what they feel. Though sin *wars*—it shall not *reign!* And though it breaks our peace—it cannot separate from his love! Nor is it inconsistent with his holiness and perfection, to manifest his favor to such poor defiled creatures, or to admit them to communion with himself; for they are not considered as in *themselves*—but as one with *Jesus*, to whom they have fled for refuge, and by whom they live a life of faith. They are *accepted in the Beloved*, they have an Advocate with the Father, who once made an atonement for their sins, and who ever lives to make intercession for them. Though they cannot fulfill the law, he has fulfilled it for them. Though the obedience of the *members* is defiled

and imperfect, the obedience of the *Head* is spotless and complete. Though there is much *evil* in them, there is something good, the *fruit* of his own gracious Spirit. They act from a principle of love, they aim at no less than his glory, and their habitual desires are supremely fixed upon himself.

There is a difference in kind, between the feeblest efforts of faith in a real believer, while he is covered with shame at the thoughts of his miscarriages, and the highest and most specious attainments of those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Nor shall this conflict remain long, or the enemy finally prevail over them. They are *supported by Almighty power*, and led on to certain victory. They shall not always be as they are now; in a little while, they shall be freed from this vile body, which, like the leprous house, is incurably contaminated, and must be entirely taken down! Then they shall see Jesus as he is—and be like him and with him for ever!

The gracious purposes to which the Lord makes the sense and feeling of our depravity subservient, are manifold. Hereby his own power, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, are more signally displayed. His *power*, in maintaining his own work in the midst of so much opposition, like a *spark* burning in the midst of an ocean, or a *bush* unconsumed in the flames. His *wisdom*, in defeating and controlling all the devices which Satan, from his knowledge of the evil of our nature, is encouraged to practice against us. He has overthrown many a fair professor, and, like Goliath, he challenges the whole army of Israel; yet he finds there are some against whom, though he thrusts sorely, he cannot prevail. Notwithstanding any seeming advantage he gains at some seasons, they are still delivered, for the Lord is on their side. The unchangeableness of the Lord's love, and the riches of his mercy, are likewise more illustrated by the

multiplied pardons he bestows upon his people, than if they needed no forgiveness at all.

Hereby the Lord Jesus Christ is more endeared to the soul; all boasting is effectually excluded, and the glory of a full and free salvation is ascribed to him alone!

If a *mariner* is surprised by a storm, and after one night spent in jeopardy is presently brought safe into port; though he may rejoice in his deliverance, it will not affect him so sensibly, as if, after being tempest-tossed for a long season, and experiencing a great number and variety of hair-breadth escapes, he at last gains the desired haven. The righteous are said to be *scarcely saved*, not with respect to the certainty of the event, for the purpose of God in their favor cannot be disappointed—but in respect of their own apprehensions, and the great difficulties they are brought through! But when, after a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, willfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility, they find that none of these things can separate them from the love of Jesus—He becomes more and more precious to their souls. They love much, because much has been forgiven them. They dare not, they will not ascribe anything to themselves—but are glad to acknowledge, that they must have perished (humanly speaking) a thousand times over, if Jesus had not been their Savior, their shepherd, and their shield. When they were wandering—he brought them back; when fallen—he raised them; when wounded—he healed them; when fainting—he revived them! By him, out of weakness—they have been made strong! He has taught their hands to war, and covered their heads in the day of battle. In a word, some of the clearest proofs they have had of his excellence, have been occasioned by the humiliating proofs they have had of their own vileness. They would not have known so much of him—if they had not known so much of themselves!

Further, a *spirit of humiliation*, which is both the strength and beauty of our profession, is greatly promoted by our *feeling*, as well as *reading*, that when we would do good, evil is present with us. A broken and contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord—he has promised to dwell with those who have it. Experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces, is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature.

That we are so totally depraved, is a truth which no one ever truly learned by being only *taught* it. Indeed, if we could receive, and habitually maintain, a right judgment of ourselves, by what is plainly declared in Scripture, it would probably save us many a mournful hour! But *experience* is the Lord's school, and those who are taught by him usually learn that they have no *wisdom*—by the mistakes they make; and that they have no *strength*—by the slips and falls they meet with. Every day draws forth some new corruption, which before was little observed, or at least discovers it in a stronger light than before. Thus by degrees, they are weaned from leaning to any supposed wisdom, power, or goodness in themselves! They feel the truth of our Lord's words, "without me—you can do nothing;" and the necessity of crying with David, "O lead me and guide me!"

It is chiefly by this frame of mind, that one Christian is different from another; for, though it is an inward feeling, it has very observable outward effects, which are expressively intimated, Ezekiel 16:63, "You will remember your sins and cover your mouth in silence and shame—when I forgive you of all that you have done, says the Sovereign Lord." That is—the knowledge of God's full and free forgiveness of your innumerable backslidings and transgressions, shall make you ashamed, and silence the unruly workings of your heart. You shall open your mouth in praise; but you shall no more boast in yourself, or censure others, or repine at my dispensations.

In these respects, we are exceedingly prone to speak unadvisedly with our lips; but a sense of *our* great unworthiness, and *God's* great grace and forgiveness, checks these evils. Whoever is truly humbled will not be easily angry, will not be positive and rash, will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow-sinners; knowing, that, if there is a difference—it is grace which has made that difference; and that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart!

Likewise, under all trials and afflictions, he will look to the hand of the Lord, and lay his mouth in the dust, acknowledging that he suffers much less than his iniquities have deserved.

These are some of the advantages and good fruits which the Lord enables us to obtain from **that bitter root, indwelling sin!**

The Work of Grace

September 3, 1776.

My dear Miss M,

We saw no danger upon the road homeward; but my judgment tells me we are always upon the brink of danger, though we see it not; and that, without the immediate protection and care of Him who preserves the stars in their courses--there could be no traveling safely a few miles, nor even sitting in safety by the fire-side! But with him we are safe in all places and circumstances, until our race is done, and his gracious purposes concerning us in the present life are

completely answered. Then he will call us home, that we may see his face, and be with him forever! *It will not much matter, by what messenger he shall be pleased to call us home by.*

While he took care of us abroad, he watched over our concerns at home likewise; so that we found all well upon our return, and met with nothing to grieve us. Many go out and return home no more, and many find distressing things have happened in their absence; but we have to set up our Ebenezer, and to say, *Hitherto he has helped us!* Assist me to praise him. The Lord is leading you in the good old way, in which you may perceive the footsteps of his flock who have gone before you. They had in their day the same difficulties, fears, and troubles as we have; and, through mercy, we partake of the same consolation which supported and refreshed them; and the promises which they trusted and found faithful--are equally sure to us. It is still true--that those who believe shall never be confounded.

If left to ourselves, we would have built upon sand. But he has provided and revealed a sure foundation, removed our natural prejudices against it; and now, though rains, and floods, and storms assault our building, it cannot fall--for it is founded upon a rock--the Lord Jesus Christ!

The suspicious and fears which arise in an awakened mind, proceed, in a good measure, from remaining unbelief; but not wholly so, for there is a jealousy and self-distrust of ourselves, a wariness, owing to a sense of the deceitfulness of our hearts--which is a grace, and a gift of the Lord.

Some people, who have much zeal--but are destitute of this jealous fear--may be compared to a ship which spreads a great deal of sail--but is not properly ballasted, and is therefore in danger of being over

set whenever a storm comes. A sincere person has many reasons for distrusting his own judgment; is sensible of the vast importance of the case, and afraid of too hastily concluding in his own favor, and therefore not easily satisfied. However, this fear, though useful, especially to young beginners, is not comfortable. Those who simply wait upon Jesus, are gradually freed from it, in proportion as their knowledge of him, and their experience of his goodness, increases.

He has a time for settling and establishing them in himself--and his time is best. We are hasty, and would be satisfied at once; but his word is, "wait for the Lord's time." **The work of grace** is not like Jonah's gourd, which sprang up and flourished in a night--and as quickly withered; but rather like the oak, which, from a little acorn and a tender plant, advances with an almost imperceptible growth from year to year, until it becomes a broad-spreading and deep-rooted tree, and then it stands for ages. The *Christian oak* shall grow and flourish forever.

When I see any, soon after they appear to be awakened, making a speedy profession of great joy, before they have a due acquaintance with their own hearts--I am in pain for them. I am not sorry to hear them afterwards complain that their joys are gone, and they are almost at their wit's end; for, without some such check, to make them feel their weakness and dependence, I seldom find them to turn out well; either their fervor insensibly abates, until they become quite cold, and sink into the world again--of which I have seen many instances. Or, if they do not give up all--their walk is uneven, and their spirit has not that savor of *brokenness* and *true humility* which is a chief ornament of our holy profession. If they do not feel the plague of their hearts at first--they find it out afterwards, and too often manifest it to others.

Therefore, though I know the Spirit of the Lord is free, and will not be confined to our rules, and there may be excepted cases; yet, in general, I believe the old proverb, "Soft and fair goes far," will hold good in Christian experience. Let us be thankful for the beginnings of grace, and wait upon our Savior patiently for the increase. And as we have chosen him for our physician--let us commit ourselves to his management, and not prescribe to him what he shall prescribe for us. He knows us and he loves us better than we do ourselves, and will do all things well.

You say, "It never came with power and life to my soul that he died for me." If you mean that you never had any extraordinary sudden manifestation, something like a vision or a voice from heaven, confirming it to you, I can say the same. But I know he died for sinners; I know I am a sinner; I know he invites those who are ready to perish; I am such a one. I know, upon his own invitation, I have committed myself to him; and I know, by the effects, that he has been with me hitherto, otherwise I should have been an apostate long ago! And therefore I know that he died for me; for had he been pleased to damn me (as he justly might have done), he would not have shown me such things as these.

If I must perish, would the Lord
Have taught my heart to love his Word?
Would he have given me eyes to see
My danger and my remedy;
Revealed his name, and bid me pray--
Had he resolved to say me *nay*?

I know that I am his child, because he teaches me to say, *Abba, Father*. I know that I am his, because he has enabled me to choose him for my best portion. For such a choice and desire could never

have taken place in my heart--if he had not placed it there himself. By nature I was too *blind* to know him, too *proud* to trust him, too *obstinate* to serve him, too *base-minded* to love him. The enmity I was filled with against his government, righteousness, and grace--was too strong to be subdued by any power but his own. The love I bear to him is but a faint and feeble spark--but it is an emanation from himself; he kindled it, and he keeps it alive; and because it is his work, I trust many waters shall not quench it.

Difficulties and Snares

April 15, 1776.

My dear Sir,

I often rejoice on your behalf. Your call out of the world was a singular, comfortable instance of the power of grace. And when I consider the **difficulties and snares** of your situation, and that you have been kept in the middle path, preserved from undue compliances on the one hand, and unnecessary singularities on the other, I cannot doubt but the Lord has hitherto helped and guided you. Indeed you have need of his guidance. At your young years, and with your expectations in life, your health firm, and your natural spirits lively—you are exposed to many snares. Yet if the Lord keeps you sensible of your danger, and dependent upon him, you will walk safely. Your security, success, and comfort, depend upon him; and in the way of means of grace—chiefly upon your being preserved in a humble sense of your own weakness.

It is written, "Fear not, I am with you." It is written again, "Blessed is the man who fears always." There is a perfect harmony in those seemingly different texts. May the wisdom which comes from above,

teach you and I to keep them both united in our view. If the Lord is with us—we have no cause of fear. His *eye* is upon us, his *arm* is over us, his *ear* is open to our prayer; his grace sufficient, his promise unchangeable. Under his protection, though the path of duty should lie through fire and water—we may cheerfully and confidently pursue it.

On the other hand, our hearts are so deceitful, fallible, and frail; our spiritual enemies so subtle, watchful, and powerful; and they derive so many advantages from the occasions of every day, in which we are unavoidably and unexpectedly concerned; there is so much combustible materials within us, and so many temptations arising from without, capable of setting all in a flame; that we cannot be too jealous of ourselves and our circumstances.

When we can say, in the Psalmist's spirit, "*Hold me up*" we may warrantably draw his conclusion, "*and I shall be safe!*" But the moment we lean to our own strength and wisdom—we are in imminent danger of falling. The enemy who wars against our souls, is a consummate master in his subtle devices, prolific in stratagems, and equally skillful in carrying on his assaults by sap or by storm. He studies us, if I may so say, all round, to discover our weak sides. He is a very *proteus* for changing his appearances, and can appear as a sly serpent, a roaring lion, or an angel of light—as best suits his purpose. It is a great mercy to be in some measure acquainted with his devices, and aware of them. Those who wait humbly upon the Lord, and consult carefully at his word and throne of grace, are made wiser than their enemy—and enabled to escape and withstand his wiles.

I know you will not expect me to apologize for putting you in mind of these things, though you know them. I have a double warrant; the love I bear you, and the Lord's command, Heb. 3:13. Use the like

freedom with me; I need it, and hope to be thankful for it, and accept it as one of the best proofs of friendship.

May the Lord bless and keep you. Pray for us, and believe me to be sincerely yours.

Addressing the Unconverted

Dear sir,

In a late conversation you desired my thoughts concerning a Scriptural and consistent manner of addressing the consciences of unawakened sinners in the course of your ministry. It is a point on which many eminent ministers have been, and are not a little divided; and it therefore befits me to propose my sentiments with modesty and caution, so far as I am constrained to differ from any, from whom, in general, I would be glad to learn.

Some think that it is sufficient to preach the great truths of the Word of God in their hearing; to set forth the utterly ruined and helpless state of fallen man by nature, and the appointed method of salvation by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then to leave the application entirely to the agency of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten the dark understandings of sinners, and enable them to receive, in a due measure, the doctrines of either the Law or the Gospel. And they apprehend that all exhortations, arguments, and motives, addressed to those who are supposed to be still under the influence of a carnal mind, are inconsistent with the principles of free grace, and the acknowledged inability of such persons to perform any spiritual acts; and that, therefore, the preachers who, avowing the doctrines of free grace, do, notwithstanding, plead and expostulate with sinners, usually contradict themselves, and retract

in their application, what they had labored to establish in the course of their sermon.

There are others, who, though they would be extremely unwilling to derogate from the free grace and sovereign power of God in the great work of conversion, or in the least degree encourage the mistaken notion which every unconverted person has of his own power; yet think it their duty to deal with sinners as rational and moral agents; and as such, besides declaring the counsel of God in a doctrinal way, *to warn them*, by His tender mercies, that they receive not the grace of God in a preached Gospel in vain. Nor can it be denied but that some of them, when deeply affected with the worth of souls, and the awful importance of eternal things, have sometimes, in the warmth of their hearts, dropped unguarded expressions, and such as have been justly liable to exception.

If we were to decide to which of these different methods of preaching the preference is due, by the *discernible effects* of each, it will, perhaps, appear in fact, without making any invidious comparisons, that those ministers whom the Lord has honored with the greatest success in awakening and converting sinners, have generally been led to adopt the more popular way of exhortation or address; while those who have been studiously careful to avoid any direct application to sinners, as unnecessary and improper, if they have not been altogether without seals to their ministry, yet their labors have been more owned in building up those who have already received the knowledge of the truth, than adding to their number.

Now, as "he who wins souls is wise," and as every faithful laborer has a warm desire of being instrumental in raising the dead in sin to a life of righteousness, this seems at least a presumptive argument in favor of those who, besides stating the doctrines of the Gospel,

endeavor, by earnest persuasions and exhortations, to impress them upon the hearts of their hearers, and entreat and warn them to consider "How they shall escape, if they neglect so great salvation." For it is not easy to conceive that the Lord should most signally bear testimony in favor of that mode of preaching which is least consistent with the Truth, and with itself.

But not to insist on this, nor to rest the cause on the authority or examples of men, the best of whom are imperfect and fallible, let us consult the Scriptures, which, as they furnish us with the whole subject-matter of our ministry, so they afford us perfect precepts and patterns for its due and orderly dispensation. With respect to the subject of our inquiry, the examples of our Lord Christ, and of His authorized ministers, the Apostles, are both *our rule and our warrant*.

The Lord Jesus was the great Preacher of free grace, "who spoke as never man spoke"; and His ministry, while it provided relief for the weary and heavy-laden, was eminently designed to stain the pride of all human glory. He knew what was in man, and declared that none would come unto Him, unless drawn and taught of God—John 6:44-46. And yet He often speaks to sinners in terms, which, if they were not known to be *His*, might perhaps, be censured as inconsistent and legal—John 6:27, Luke 13:24-27, John 12:35. It appears, both from the context and the tenor of these passages, that they were immediately spoken not of His disciples—but to the multitude. The Apostles copied from their Lord—they taught that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, even to think a good thought, and that "it is not of him that wills or of him that runs—but of God who shows mercy"; yet they plainly call upon sinners (and that *before* they had given evident signs that they were pricked in the heart as Acts 2:21)

to "repent" and turn from their vanities to the living God—Acts 3:19, 14:15, 17:30.

Peter's advice to Simon Magus is very full and express to this point—for though he perceived him to be "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity," he *exhorted* him "to repent, and to pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven." It may be presumed that we cannot have stronger evidence, that any of our readers are in a carnal and unconverted state, than Peter had in the case of Simon Magus; and therefore there seems no sufficient reason why we should hesitate to follow the Apostle's example.

You have been told that repentance and faith are spiritual acts, for the performance of which a principle of spiritual life is absolutely necessary; and that therefore, to exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or believe, must be as vain and fruitless as to call a dead person out of his grave. To this it may be answered that we might cheerfully and confidently undertake even to call the dead out of their graves, if we had the command and promise to warrant the attempt; for then we might expect His power would accompany our word.

The vision of Ezekiel in chapter 37, may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a Gospel ministry. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord's question to the Prophet, "Can these dry bones live?" Our response, like that of the Prophet's is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord, "O Lord, You know, impossible as it is to us, it is easy for You to raise them unto life; therefore *we renounce our own reasonings*, and though we see that they are dead, we call upon them at Your bidding, as if they were alive, and say, O you dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord! The

means is our part, the work is Yours, and to You be all the praise." The dry bones could not hear the Prophet; but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived—but the word was spoken to them *considered as dry and dead*.

It is true the Lord can, and I hope He often does, make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly *to them*, only the truths of the Gospel being declared in their hearing; but He who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners, so far at least as to leave them condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which He often effects the purposes of His grace; though none of the means of grace by which He ordinarily works, can produce a real change in the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of His Spirit.

Should we admit that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would, perhaps, *extend too far*, even to prove the impropriety of *all* exhortation universally—for when we invite the weary and heavy laden to come to Christ, that they may find rest; when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, "to repent and do their first works"; yes, when we exhort believers "to walk worthy of God, who has called them to His kingdom and glory"—in each of these cases we press them to acts for which *they* have *no* inherent power of their own; and unless the Lord the Spirit is pleased to apply the Word to their hearts, we do but speak to the air; and our endeavors can have no more effect in these instances than if we were to say to a dead body "arise, and walk." For an exertion of Divine power is no less necessary to the healing of a wounded conscience, than the breaking

of a hard heart; and only He who has begun the good work of grace, is able either to revive or to maintain it.

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore *mere machines*. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways; they know they are mortal; and the bulk of them are persuaded in their consciences that after death there is an appointed judgment. They are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins; that they do so, is not for lack of power—but for lack of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths, while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning until night. And many would be deterred from sins to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes.

They have a power likewise of attending upon the means of grace; and though the Lord alone can give them true faith and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the Gospel-promises, to seek to Him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do for them that which they cannot do for themselves, and who has said "him who comes unto Me, I will never cast out."

Perhaps it will not be easily proved that entreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are in the main agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner's salvation from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should, undoubtedly, endeavor to maintain a consistency in our preaching; but unless we keep the plan and manner of Scriptures constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of "consistency" may fetter our sentiments, and greatly *preclude* our usefulness. We need not wish to be more "consistent" *than the inspired writers*, nor be afraid of speaking as *they* have spoken before us! We may easily perplex ourselves and our hearers *by nice reasonings* on the nature of human liberty, and the Divine agency on the hearts of men; but such disquisitions *are better avoided*. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects until we arrive in the world of Light.

In the meantime, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plain before us. If when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favors you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge, and fills your heart with His constraining love, many little curious distinctions, which amuse you at other times, will be forgotten. Your soul will go forth with your words; and while your affections yearn over poor sinners, you will not hesitate a moment, whether you ought to warn them of their danger or not. That great champion of free grace, John Owen, has a very solemn address to sinners, the running title to which is, "Exhortations unto believing." It is in his Exposition of the 130th Psalm, which I recommend to your attentive consideration.

John Newton, 1770

Soldiers of Christ

July 13, 1776.

My dear Sir,

The Lord, who mercifully called you out of a state of thoughtless dissipation, and has hitherto been with you—will, I trust, sweeten all your trials, and cause his light to shine upon your paths.

The Lord is all-sufficient. A lively sense of his love, a deep impression of eternity, a heart filled with zeal for his cause, and a thirst for the good of souls—will, I hope, enable you to make a cheerful sacrifice of whatever has no necessary connection with your peace and his service. And you may rest assured, that whenever He, who loves you better than you do yourself, sees it best for you upon the whole to change your condition—he will bring it about. He will point out the person, prepare the means, and secure the success, by his providence, and the power he has over every heart. And you shall see that all previous difficulties were either *gracious preventions*, which he threw in the way—to prevent your taking a wrong step; or temporary bars, which, by his removing them afterwards, should give you opportunity of more clearly perceiving his care and interposition in your favor. In the mean time, remember your high calling. You are a minister and ambassador of Christ—you are entrusted with the most honorable and important employment that can engage and animate the heart of man! 1Ti. 4:15.

Filled and fired with a constraining sense of the love of Jesus and the worth of souls, impressed with an ardor to carry war into Satan's kingdom, to storm his strong-holds, and rescue his captives; you will have little leisure to think of anything else.

How does the *love of glory* stimulate the soldier, make him forget and forego a thousand personal tenderness, and prompt him to cross oceans, to traverse deserts, to scale mountains, and plunge into the greatest hardships and the thickest dangers! They do it for a

corruptible crown—a puff of breath, an empty fame; their highest prospect is the applause and favor of their prince.

We likewise are **soldiers**—we have a Prince and Captain who deserves our all. Those who know him, and have hearts to conceive of his excellence, and to feel their obligations to him, cannot, indeed, seek their own glory; but his glory is dearer to them than a thousand lives. They owe him their souls, for he redeemed them with blood, his own blood; and by his grace he subdued and pardoned them when they were rebels, and in arms against him! Therefore they are not their own; they would not desire to be their own. When his standard is raised, when his enemies are in motion, when his people are to be rescued, they go forth, clothed with his panoply; they fight under his eye, they are sure of his support, and he shows them the conqueror's crown. Oh, when they think of that "Well done, good servant" with which he has promised to welcome them home when the campaign is over, hard things seem easy, and bitter things seem sweet. They count nothing, not even their own lives, dear, so that they may finish their course with joy. May the Lord make us thus minded; give us a hearty concern for his business; and he has engaged to take care of ours; and nothing that can conduce to our real comfort and usefulness shall be withheld.

What a Christian *Ought* to Be

September, 1772

Dear sir,

Weak, unskillful, and unfaithful, as I am in practice—the Lord has been pleased to give me some idea of what a Christian ought to be, **and of what is actually attainable in the present life**, by those

whom he enables earnestly to aspire towards the prize of their high calling. They who are versed in mechanics can, from a knowledge of the combined powers of a complicated machine, make an exact calculation of what it is able to perform, and what resistance it can counteract. But who can compute the possible effects of that combination of principles and motives revealed in the Gospel, upon a heart duly impressed with a sense of their importance and glory?

When I was recently at Mr. Cox's Museum, while I was fixing my attention upon some curious movements, imagining that I saw the whole of the artist's design, the person who showed it touched a little spring, and suddenly a thousand new and unexpected motions took place—and the whole piece seemed animated from the top to the bottom. I would have formed but a very imperfect judgment of it—had I seen no more than what I saw at first. I thought this might, in some measure, illustrate the vast difference that is observable among professors, even among those who are, it is to be hoped, sincere.

There are people who appear to have a true knowledge (in part) of the nature of Gospel religion—but seem not to be apprised of its properties in their extent. If they have attained to some hope of their acceptance, if they find at seasons some communion with God in the means of grace, if they are in measure delivered from the prevailing and corrupt customs of the world—they seem to be as satisfied, as if they were possessed of all. These are indeed great things. The profession of too many, whose sincerity, charity would be unwilling to impeach—is *greatly blemished*, notwithstanding their hopes and their occasional comforts—by the breaking forth of unsanctified tempers, and the indulgence of vain hopes, anxious cares, and selfish pursuits.

Far, very far, am I from that unscriptural sentiment of *sinless perfection* in fallen man. To those who have a due sense of the spirituality and ground of the Divine precepts, and of what passes in their own hearts—causes of humiliation and self-abasement on the account of sin will never be lacking. Yet still there is a liberty and privilege attainable by the Gospel, beyond what is ordinarily thought of. Permit me to mention two or three particulars, in which those who have a holy ambition of aspiring to them, shall not be altogether disappointed.

A delight in the Lord's all-sufficiency, to be satisfied in him as our present and eternal portion. This, in the sense in which I understand it, is not the effect of a present warm frame—but of a deeply rooted and abiding principle; the habitual exercise of which is to be estimated by the *comparative indifference* with which other things are regarded. The soul thus principled, is not at leisure to take or to seek satisfaction in anything but what has a known subservience to this leading taste. Either the Lord is present—and then he is to be rejoiced in; or else he is absent—and then he is to be sought and waited for. They are to be pitied, who, if they are at some times happy in the Lord, can at other times be happy without him, and rejoice in broken cisterns, when their spirits are at a distance from the Fountain of living waters.

I do not plead for an **absolute indifference to temporal blessings**. God gives us all things richly to enjoy; and a capacity of relishing them, is his gift likewise; but then the consideration of his love in bestowing all our temporal blessings, should exceedingly enhance the value, and a regard to his will should regulate their use. Nor can they all supply the lack of that which we can only receive immediately from himself. This principle likewise moderates that inordinate *fear* and *sorrow* to which we are liable, upon the prospect

or the occurrence of great trials, for which there is a sure support and resource provided in the all-sufficiency of infinite goodness and grace. What a privilege is this—to possess God in all things while we have them—and all things in God when they are taken from us!

An acquiescence in the Lord's will—founded in a persuasion of his wisdom, holiness, sovereignty, and goodness. This is one of the greatest privileges and brightest ornaments of our profession. So far as we attain to this—we are secure from disappointment. Our own limited views, and short-sighted purposes and desires, may be, and will be, often over-ruled; but then, our main and leading desire, that the will of the Lord may be done, and must be accomplished. How highly does it befit us, both as *creatures* and as *sinner*s—to submit to the appointments of our Maker! And how necessary is it to our peace!

This great attainment is too often unthought of, and overlooked. We are prone to fix our attention upon the *second causes* and *immediate instruments* of events; forgetting that whatever befalls us, is according to God's purpose, and therefore must be right and seasonable in itself, and shall in the outcome, be productive of good. From hence arise impatience, resentment, and secret repining, which are not only sinful—but tormenting! Whereas, if all things are in his hand; if the very hairs of our head are numbered; if every event, great and small, is under the direction of his providence and purpose; and if he has a wise, holy, and gracious end in view, to which everything that happens is subordinate and subservient—then we have nothing to do—but with patience and humility to follow as he leads, and cheerfully to expect a happy outcome. The path of present duty is marked out; and the concerns of the next and every following hour—are in his hands. How happy are those who can resign all to him, see

his hand in every dispensation, and believe that he chooses better for them—than they could possibly choose for themselves!

A single eye to his glory—as the ultimate scope of all our undertakings. The Lord can design nothing short of his own glory—nor should we. The constraining love of Christ has a direct and marvelous tendency, in proportion to the measure of faith, to mortify the corrupt principle, SELF, which for a season is the grand spring of our conduct and by which we are too much biased after we know the Lord. But as *grace* prevails, *self* is renounced. We feel that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price; and that it is our duty, our honor, and our happiness, to be the servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To devote soul and body, every talent, power, and faculty, to the service of his cause and will; to let our light shine (in our several situations) to the praise of his grace; to place our highest joy in the contemplation of his adorable perfections; to rejoice even in tribulations and distresses, in reproaches and infirmities—if thereby the power of Christ may rest upon us, and be magnified in us; to be content, yes glad, *to be nothing*—that he may be all in all; to obey him, in opposition to the threats or solicitations of men; to *trust* him, though all outward appearances seem against us; to *rejoice* in him, though we should (as will sooner or later be the case) have nothing else to rejoice in; to live above the world, and to have our hearts in heaven; to be like the angels, finding our own pleasure in performing his—this is the prize, the mark of our high calling, to which we are encouraged with a holy ambition continually to aspire! It is true, we shall still fall short; we shall find that, when we would do good, evil will be present with us. But the attempt is glorious, and shall not be *wholly* in vain. He who gives us thus to *desire*, will enable us to *perform* with growing success, and teach us to profit, even by our mistakes and imperfections.

O blessed man! who thus fears the Lord; who delights in his Word, and derives his principles, motives, maxims, and consolations, from that unfailing source of light and strength. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf is always green, and fruit abundant. The *wisdom* of God shall direct his plans, and inspire his counsels. The *power* of God shall guard him on every side, and prepare his way through every difficulty. He shall see mountains sink into plains—and streams spring up in the dry wilderness. The Lord's enemies will be his enemies; and they may be permitted to fight against him—but they shall not prevail, for the Lord is with him to deliver him. The conduct of such a one, though in a narrow and retired sphere of life, is of more real excellence and importance, than the most splendid actions of kings and conquerors, which fill the annals of history! And if the God whom he serves is pleased to place him in a more public light, his labors and cares will be amply compensated, by the superior opportunities afforded him of manifesting the power and reality of true religion, and promoting the good of mankind.

I hope I may say, that I *desire* to be thus entirely given up to the Lord; I am sure I must say, that what I have written is far from being my *actual experience*. Alas! I might be condemned out of my own mouth, were the Lord strict to mark what is amiss. But, O the comfort! we are not under the *law*—but under *grace*. The *Gospel* is a dispensation for *sinners*, and we have an Advocate with the Father. There is the unshaken ground of hope. A reconciled Father, a prevailing Advocate, a powerful Shepherd, a compassionate Friend, a Savior who is able and willing to save to the uttermost! He knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust; and has opened for us a new and blood-besprinkled way of access to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need.

Our Common Mercies

April, 1773

Dear sir,

For the past five or six weeks—I have been a good deal sickly. The ground of my illness was a cold, attended with a slight fever, and for some time with a cough, which made me feel some inconvenience in preaching. This was followed by a deafness, so great as to cut me off from conversation; for I could not hear the sound of a voice, unless it was spoken loud in my ear. But the Lord has mercifully removed the fever and cough, opened my ears, and I am now nearly as well as usual. I had cause to be *thankful*, especially for two things, under this dispensation:

First, that I was enabled, though sometimes with a little difficulty, to go on with my public work. It is a singular favor I have to acknowledge, that for the space of almost nine years, since I have been in the ministry, our Sunday and weekly services have not been once suspended; whereas I have seen many of the Lord's servants laid aside for a considerable space, within that time. My other great mercy was, that the Lord was pleased to preserve me in a peaceful, resigned frame; so that when I was deaf, and could not be certain that I should recover my hearing any more—I was in general as cheerful and easy as at other times. This was the effect of his goodness—for though I know enough of his sovereignty, wisdom, and faithfulness, of his right to do what he pleases, and the certainty that he does all things well—to furnish me with arguments enough to prove that *submission to his will* is our absolute duty—yet I am sensible, that when the trial actually comes, notwithstanding all the

advice I may have offered to others—that I would myself toss like a wild bull in a net; rebel and repine; forget that I am a sinner, and that God is sovereign! This, I say, would always and invariably be the case—unless he was graciously pleased to fulfill his Word, that *strength* shall be given to me, according to needs of the day.

I hope my *deafness* has been instructive to me. The exercise of our *senses* is so *easily* and *constantly* performed, that it seems a thing of a matter of course; but I was then reminded how precarious the tenure is, by which we hold those blessings which seem most our own, and which are most immediately necessary to the comfortable enjoyment of life. Outward senses, mental faculties, health of body, and peace of mind, are extremely valuable; but the continuance of them for a single moment depends upon him who—if he opens none can shut, and when he shuts none can open. A single moment is more than sufficient to deprive us of what we hold most dear, or to prevent us from deriving the least comfort from it if it is not taken away.

I am not presuming to give you information; but only mentioning the thoughts which were much upon my mind while I was incapable of conversation. These are indeed plain and obvious truths, which I have long acknowledged as indisputable; but I have reason to be thankful when the Lord impresses them with fresh power upon my heart, even though he sees fit to do it by the medium of *afflictions*. I have seen of late, something of the weight and importance of that admonition, "This is what the Lord says—Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches—but let him who boasts boast about this—that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight." Jeremiah 9:23-24. This is a passage which, though

addressed to the wise, the mighty, and the rich—is of universal application. For SELF, unless corrected and mortified by grace—will find something whereof to boast, in the lowest characters and situations.

And indeed, when things come to be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, the *lunatics in Bedlam*, some of whom boast in their *straw* or their *chains*, as marks of splendor or ensigns of royalty—have as much reason on their side, as any people upon earth who boast in themselves. This alone is the proper ground of glory and joy—a true knowledge of the true God. Then all is safe at present, and all will be happy forever. Then, whatever changes may affect our temporal concerns—our best interests and hopes are secured beyond the reach of change; and whatever we may lose or suffer during this little span of time—will be abundantly compensated in that glorious state of eternity which is just at hand!

A Visitor from Heaven!

August, 1775

Dear sir,

I have no apt preface or introduction at hand, and as I have made it almost a rule not to study for what I would write to you, I therefore beg permission to begin abruptly.

It is the future promised privilege of believers in Jesus, that they *shall* be as the angels; and there is a sense in which we should endeavor to be as the angels *now*. This is intimated to us where we are taught to pray, "May Your will be done on *earth*—as it is in *heaven*." I have sometimes amused myself with supposing that an

angel should be appointed to reside awhile upon earth in a human body; not in sinful flesh like ours—but in a body free from infirmity, and still preserving an unabated sense of his own happiness in the favor of God, and of his unspeakable obligation to his goodness. And then I have tried to judge, as well as I could, how such an angel would conduct himself in such a situation. I know not that I ever enlarged upon the thought, either in preaching or writing. Permit me to follow it a little in this paper.

Were I acquainted with this heavenly visitant, I am willing to hope I should greatly reverence him; and, if permitted, be glad, in some cases, to consult him. In some—but not in all; for I think my *fear* would be equal to my *love*. Methinks I could never venture to open my heart freely to him, and unfold to him my numberless complaints and infirmities; for, as he could have no experience of the like things himself, I would suppose he would not know how fully to pity me, indeed, hardly how to bear with me—if I told him all. Alas! what a preposterous, strange, vile creature should I appear to an angel, if he knew me as I am!

It is well for me that Jesus was made lower than the angels, and that the human nature he assumed was not distinct from the common nature of mankind, though secured from the common depravity; and because he submitted to be under the law in our name and stead, though he was free from sin himself—yet, sin and its consequences being (for our sakes) charged upon him, he acquired, in the days of his humiliation, an *experimental sympathy* with his poor people. He knows the effects of sin and temptation upon us, by that knowledge whereby he knows all things; but he knows them likewise in a way more suitable for our comfort and relief, by the sufferings and exercises he passed through for us! Hence arises our encouragement.

We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities—but was in all points tempted even as we are.

When I add to this, the consideration of his power, promises, and grace, and that he is exalted on purpose to pity, relieve, and save—I gather courage. With him I dare be free; and am not sorry—but glad, that *he knows me perfectly*, that not a thought of my heart is hidden from him. For, without this infinite and exact knowledge of my *disease*—how could he effectually administer to my *cure*?

Where am I rambling? I seem to have lost sight of *the angel* already! I am now coming back, that, if he cannot effectually *pity* me, he may at least *animate* and *teach* me.

In the first place, I take it for granted this angel would think himself a stranger and pilgrim upon earth. He would not forget that his home was in heaven. Surely he would look upon all the *bustle of human life* (farther than the design of his mission might connect him with it) with more indifference than we look upon the *play of little children*, or the *amusements of idiots and lunatics*, which give us an uneasiness, rather than excite a desire of joining in them. He would judge of everything around him, by the reference and tendency it had to promote the will of him who sent him; and the most splendid appearances, considered in any other view, would make no impression upon him.

Consequently, as to his own concernment, all his aim and desire would be to fulfill the will of God. All situations would be alike to him; whether he was commanded, as in the case of Sennacherib, to destroy a mighty army with a stroke; or, as in the case of Hagar, to attend upon a woman, as a servant. Both services would be to him equally honorable and important, because he was in both equally pleasing his Lord, which would be his element and his joy, whether

he was appointed to guide the reins of empire—or to sweep the streets!

Again—the angel would doubtless exhibit a striking example of benevolence; for, being free from selfish bias, filled with a sense of the love of God, and a knowledge of his adorable perfections, his whole heart and soul and strength would be engaged and exerted, both from duty and inclination, to relieve the miseries and advance the happiness of all around him. In this, he would follow the pattern of Him who does good to all, commanding his sun to rise and his rain to fall upon the just and the unjust; though, from the same pattern, he would show an especial regard to the household of faith. An angel would take but little part in the controversies, contentions, and broils, which might happen in the time of his sojourning here—but would be a friend to all, so far as consistent with the general good.

The will and glory of God being the angel's great purpose, and having a more lively sense of the realities of an unseen world than we can at present conceive—he would certainly, in the first and chief place, have the success and spread of the glorious Gospel at heart. Angels, though not redeemed with blood—yet feel themselves nearly concerned in the work of redemption. They admire its mysteries. We may suppose them well informed in the works of creation and providence; but (unlike too many men, who are satisfied with the knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, or history) they search and pry into the *counsels of redeeming love*, rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, and think themselves well employed to be ministering spirits, to minister to the heirs of salvation. It would therefore be his chief delight to espouse and promote their cause, and to employ all his talents and influence in spreading the savor and knowledge of the name of Jesus—which is the only and effectual means, of bringing

sinners out of bondage and darkness—into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Lastly—though his zeal for the glory of his Lord would make him willing to continue here until he had finished the work given him to do—he would, I am persuaded, look forward with desire to the appointed moment of his recall back to heaven—that he might be freed from beholding and mixing with the *sin* and *vanity* of those who know not God, render his account with joy, and be welcomed to heaven with a "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Surely he would long for this, as a laborer for the setting sun; and would not form any connection with the things of time, which should prompt him to wish his removal protracted for a single hour beyond the period of his prescribed service.

Alas! why am not I more like an angel? My views, in my better judgment, are the same. My motives and obligations are even stronger—an angel is not so deeply indebted to the grace of God, as a believing sinner, who was once upon the brink of destruction, has been redeemed with blood, and might justly have been, before now, shut up with the powers of darkness without hope! Yet the merest trifles are sufficient to debase my views, damp my activity, and impede my endeavors in the Lord's service, though I profess to have no other end or desire which can make a continuance in life worthy my wish!

O for a Warmer Heart

May 19, 1775
My dear Sir,

I hope you will experience the Lord present with you—at all times and in all places. When it is so, we are at home everywhere; when it is otherwise, home is a prison, and abroad a wilderness. I know what I ought to desire, and what I do desire. I point him out to others as the all in all; I esteem him as such in my own judgment; but, alas! my experience abounds with complaints. He is my sun; but clouds, and sometimes walls, intercept him from my view. He is my strength; yet I am prone to lean upon broken reeds. He is my friend; but on my part there is such coldness and ingratitude as no other friend could bear with! But still he is gracious, and shames me with his repeated multiplied goodness to me. **O for a warmer heart**, a more simple dependence, a more active zeal, a more sensible deliverance from the effects of this body of sin and death!

He helps me in my endeavors to keep the vineyards of others; but, alas! my own vineyard does not seem to flourish as some do around me! However, though I cannot say I labor more abundantly than they all, I have reason to say, with thankfulness, "By the grace of God, I am what I am!" My poor story would soon be much worse, did not he support, restrain, and watch over me every minute! Let me entreat your praises and prayers, on the behalf of me and mine; and may the Lord bless you and yours with an increase in every good.

Without Me You Can do Nothing

February 23, 1775

Dear sir,

I assent to our Lord's declaration, "Without Me you can do nothing;" not only upon the authority of the Speaker--but from the same irresistible and experimental evidence, as if he had told me, that I cannot make the sun to shine, or change the course of the seasons. Though my pen and my tongue sometimes move freely--yet the total incapacity and stagnation of thought I labor under at other times, convinces me, that *in myself I have not sufficiency to think a good thought!* And I believe the case would be the same, if that little measure of knowledge and abilities, which I am too prone to look upon as my own, were a thousand times greater than it is.

For every new service, I stand in need of a new supply, and can bring forth nothing of my supposed store into actual exercise--but by his immediate assistance. His gracious influence is that, to those who are best furnished with gifts, which the water is to the mill, or the wind to the ship, without which the whole apparatus is motionless and useless.

I apprehend that we lose much of the comfort which might arise from a sense of our continual dependence upon him, and, of course, fall short of acknowledging as we ought what we receive from him--by mistaking the manner of his operation. Perhaps we take it too much for granted, that communications from himself must bear some kind of sensible impression that they are his, and therefore are ready to give our own *industry* or *ingenuity*, the credit for those performances in which we can perceive no such divine impression. Yet it is very possible that we may be under his influence, when we

are least aware! And though what we say, or write, or do, may seem no way extraordinary; yet that we should be led to such a particular turn of thought at one time rather than at another, has, in my own concerns, often appeared to me remarkable, from the *circumstances* which have attended, or the *consequences* which have followed.

How often, in the choice of a text, or in the course of a sermon, or in a letter to a friend, have I been led to speak a word in season--and what I have expressed at large, and in general--has been so exactly suited to some case which I was utterly unacquainted with--that I could hardly have hit it so well, had I been previously informed of it. Some instances of this kind have been so striking, as hardly to admit a doubt of *divine agency*. And, indeed, if believers in Jesus, however unworthy in themselves, are the temples of the Holy Spirit; if the Lord lives, dwells, and walks in them; if he is their life and their light; if he has promised to guide them with his eye, and to work in them to will and to do of his own good pleasure; methinks what I have mentioned, and more, may be reasonably expected.

That line in the hymn, "*Help I every moment need,*" is not a hyperbolic expression--but strictly and literally true, not only in great emergencies--but in our smoother hours, and most familiar paths. This gracious assistance is afforded in a way *imperceptible* to ourselves, to hide pride from us, and to prevent us from being indolent and careless with respect to the use of appointed means. And it would be likewise more abundantly, and perhaps more sensibly afforded, were our spirits more simple in waiting upon the Lord. But, alas! a divided heart, an undue attachment to some temporal object, sadly deadens our spirits (I speak for myself), and grieves the Lord's Spirit; so that we walk in darkness and at a distance, and, though called to great privileges, live far below them!

But methinks the thought of him who is always near, and upon whom we do and must incessantly *depend*, should suggest a powerful motive for the closest attention to his revealed will, and the most punctual compliance with it. For so far as the Lord withdraws from us--we become as blind men; and with the clearest light, and upon the plainest ground, we are liable, or rather sure, to stumble at every step.

Though there is a principle of consciousness, and a determination of the will, sufficient to denominate our thoughts and performances *our own*; yet I believe mankind in general are more under an *invisible agency* than they apprehend. The Lord, immediately from himself, and perhaps by the ministry of his holy angels--guides, prompts, restrains, or warns his people. So there undoubtedly is what I may call a *black inspiration*--the influence of the evil spirits, who work in the hearts of the disobedient, and not only excite their wills--but assist their faculties, and qualify as well as incline them to be more assiduously wicked, and more extensively mischievous, than they could be of themselves. I consider Voltaire, for instance, and many writers of the same stamp, to be little more than secretaries and amanuenses of *the evil one*--who has unspeakably more wit and adroitness in promoting infidelity and immorality, than they of themselves can justly pretend to. They have, for a while, the credit (if I may so call it) of the fund from whence they draw; but the world little imagines who is the real and original author of that philosophy and poetry, of those fine turns and sprightly inventions, which are so generally admired. Perhaps many, now applauded for their genius, would have been comparatively dolts, had they not been engaged in a cause which *Satan* has so much interest in supporting.

But, to return to the more pleasing subject. How great and honorable is the privilege of a true believer! That he has neither wisdom nor

strength in himself--is no disadvantage; for he is connected with Infinite Wisdom and Almighty Power! Though weak as a worm, his arms are strengthened by the almighty God--and all things become possible, yes easy to him--which occur within the compass of his proper duty and calling. The Lord, whom he serves, engages to proportion his strength to his day, whether it be a day of *service* or of *suffering*. And though he is fallible and short-sighted, exceeding liable to mistake and error; yet, while he retains a sense that he is so, and with the simplicity of a child asks counsel and direction of the Lord--he seldom takes a wrong step, at least not in matters of consequence. And even his sins are overruled for good. If he forgets his true state, and thinks himself to be something, he presently finds he is indeed nothing. But if he is content to be nothing, and to have nothing--he is sure to find a seasonable and abundant communication of all that he needs. Thus he lives, like Israel in the wilderness, upon mere divine bounty; but, then, it is a bounty unchangeable, unwearied, inexhaustible, and all-sufficient.

Moses, when speaking of the methods the Lord took to humble Israel, mentions his feeding them with manna, as one method. The manna would not keep; they could not hoard it up, and were therefore in a state of absolute dependence from day to day. This appointment was well suited to humble them.

Thus it is with us in spiritual matters. We would perhaps prefer to hoard up a stock of grace and sufficiency at once--such an inherent portion of wisdom and power, as we might depend upon, at least for common occasions, without being constrained, by a sense of indigence--to have continual recourse to the Lord for everything we need. But His way is best. His own glory is most displayed--and our safety best secured, by keeping us quite poor and empty in ourselves,

and supplying us from one minute to another, according to our need--out of His inexhaustible storehouse of grace.

This, if anything, will prevent boasting, and keep a sense of gratitude awake in our hearts. This is well adapted to quicken us to prayer, and furnishes us with a thousand occasions for praise, which would otherwise escape our notice.

But who or what are we, that the Most High God should thus notice us; should visit us every morning, and water us every moment! It is an astonishing thought, that God should thus dwell with men! that he, before whom the mightiest earthly potentates are less than nothing and vanity--should thus stoop and accommodate himself to the situation, needs, and capacities of the weakest, lowest, and poorest of his children! But so it has pleased him. He sees not as man sees!

Thoughts From the Sick Room

March 10, 1774

Dear sir,

For about six weeks past, I have had occasion to spend several hours of almost every day with the sick and the dying. These scenes are to a minister, like walking the hospitals to a young surgeon. The various cases which occur--exemplify, illustrate, and explain, with a commanding energy--many truths, which may be learned indeed at home--but cannot be so well understood, or their force so sensibly felt, without the advantage of *experience* and observation.

As physicians, besides that competent general knowledge of their profession, which should be common to them all, have usually their several favorite branches of study—some applying themselves more to surgery, others to medicine, others to anatomy—so ministers, as their inclinations and gifts differ, are led more closely to consider some particular branch of the system of Divine truth. Some are directed to state and defend the doctrines of the Gospel; some have a talent for elucidating difficult texts of Scripture; some have a turn for explaining the prophetic parts; and so of the rest. For myself, if it is lawful to speak of myself, and so far as I can judge, *heart-anatomy is my favorite branch—I mean, the study of the human heart, with its workings and counter-workings, as it is differently affected in a state of nature or of grace, in the different seasons of prosperity, adversity, conviction, temptation, sickness, and the approach of death.*

The Lord, by sending me here, provided me a good school for these purpose. I know not where I could have had a better one affording a greater variety of characters, in proportion to the number of people; and as they are mostly a poor people, and strangers to that culture which is the result of education, there is a simplicity in what they say or do, which gives me a peculiar advantage in judging of their cases.

But I was about to speak of **death**. Though the grand evidence of those truths upon which our hopes are built upon, arises from the authority of God speaking them in his Word, and revealing them by his Spirit to the awakened heart (for, until the heart is awakened, it is incapable of receiving this evidence); yet some of these truths are so mysterious, so utterly repugnant to the judgment of depraved nature, that, through the remaining influence of unbelief and vain reasoning, the temptations of Satan, and the subtle arguments with which some men, reputed wise, attack the foundations of our faith—the minds

even of believers are sometimes capable of being shaken. I know no better corroborating evidence for the relief of the mind under such assaults, than the testimony of dying people, especially of such as have lived outside of the *noise of controversy*, and who perhaps never heard a syllable of what has been started in these evil days against the Deity of Christ, his atonement, and other important articles.

Permit me to relate, upon this occasion, some things which exceedingly struck me in the conversation I had with a young woman, whom I visited in her last illness, about two years ago. She was a sober, prudent person, of plain sense, could read her Bible—but had read little beside. Her knowledge of the world was nearly confined to the parish; for I suppose she was seldom, if ever, twelve miles from home in her life. She had known the Gospel about seven years before the Lord visited her with a lingering consumption, which at length removed her to a better world.

A few days before her death, I had been praying by her bed-side, and in my prayer I thanked the Lord that he gave her now to see that she had not followed *cunningly devised fables*. When I had finished, she repeated that word. "No," she said, "not cunningly devised fables—these are realities indeed! I feel their truth—I feel their comfort! O tell my friends, tell my acquaintance, tell inquiring souls, tell poor sinners, tell all the daughters of Jerusalem" (alluding to Solomon's Song 5:16, from which she had just before desired me to preach at her funeral), "what Jesus has done for my soul! Tell them, that now, in the time of need, I find him to be my beloved and my friend, and as such I commend him to them!"

She then fixed her eyes steadfastly upon me, and proceeded, as well as I can recollect, as follows: "Sir, you are highly favored in being

called to preach the Gospel. I have often heard you with pleasure; but give me permission to tell you, that I now see all you have said, or can say, is, comparatively—but little. Nor, until you come into my situation, and have death and eternity fully in your view, will it be possible for you to conceive the vast weight and importance of the truths you declare. *Oh, Sir, it is a serious thing to die!* No words can express what is needful to support the soul in the solemnity of a dying hour."

I believe it was the next day when I visited her again. After some discourse, as usual, she said, with a remarkable vehemence of speech, "Are you sure I cannot be mistaken?" I answered without hesitation, "Yes, I am sure; I am not afraid to say, My soul for yours, that you are right." She paused a little, and then replied, " You say true; I know I am right. I feel that my hope is fixed upon the Rock of ages! I know in whom I have believed. Yet, if you could see with my eyes, you would not wonder at my question. But the approach of death presents a prospect, which is until then hidden from us, and which cannot be described." She said much more to the same purpose, and in all she spoke there was a dignity, weight, and evidence, which I suppose few professors of divinity, when lecturing from the chair, have at any time equaled. We may well say, with Elihu, *Who teaches like him?*

Many instances of the like kind I have met with here. I have a poor girl near me, whose mental capacity is indeed very small; but the Lord has been pleased to make her acquainted alternately with great temptations, and proportionally great discoveries of his love and truth. Sometimes, when her heart is enlarged, I listen to her with astonishment. I think no books or ministers I ever met with, have given me such an impression and understanding of Christian

experience, as I have upon some occasions received from her conversation.

But I am rambling again. My attendance upon the sick is not always equally comfortable; but could I learn aright, it might be equally instructive. Some confirm the preciousness of a Savior to me, by the cheerfulness with which, through faith in his name, they meet the *king of terrors*. Others no less confirm it, by the terror and reluctance they discover when they find they must die; for though there are too many who sadly slight the blessed Gospel while they are in health—yet in this place most are too far enlightened to be quite thoughtless about their souls, if they retain their senses in their last illness. Then, like the foolish virgins, they say, *Give us some of your oil*. Then they are willing that ministers and professors should pray with them, and speak to them.

Through the Lord's goodness, several whom I have visited in these circumstances have afforded me good hope—they have been savingly changed by his blessing upon what has passed at the eleventh hour. I have seen a marvelous and blessed change take place in their language, views, and tempers, in a few days. I now visit a young person, who is cut short in her nineteenth year by a consumption, and I think cannot live many days. I found her very ignorant and insensible to spiritual realities, and she remained so a good while; but of late I hope her heart is touched. She feels her lost state; she seems to have some right desires; she begins to pray, and in such a manner as I cannot but hope the Lord is teaching her, and will reveal himself to her before she departs.

But it is sometimes otherwise. I saw a young woman die last week—I had been often with her; but the night she was died, she could only say, "Oh, I cannot live! I cannot live!" She repeated this mournful

complaint as long as she could speak; for as the vital powers were more oppressed, her voice was changed into groans, her groans grew fainter and fainter, and in about a quarter of an hour after she had done speaking, she expired. Poor thing, I thought, as I stood by her bedside, if you were a duchess, in this situation, *what could the world do for you now!* I thought likewise how many things are there that now give us pleasure or pain, and assume a mighty importance in our view, which in a dying hour will be no more to us than the clouds which fly unnoticed over our heads Then the truth of our Lord's aphorism will be seen, felt, and acknowledged, "Only one thing is needful!"

When We See the World in Flames!

December 8, 1774

Dear sir,

How wonderful is the patience of God towards sinful men! In him they live, and move, and have their being; and if he were to withdraw his support for a single moment, they must perish! He maintains their lives, guards their persons, supplies their needs—while they employ the powers and faculties they receive from him in a settled course of opposition to his will. They trample upon his laws, affront his government, and despise his grace—yet still he spares! To silence all his adversaries in a moment, would require no extraordinary exertion of his power; but his forbearance towards them manifests his glory, and gives us cause to say, "*Who is a God like unto you?*"

Sometimes, however, there are striking instances of his displeasure against sin. When such events take place immediately upon a public and premeditated contempt offered to Him who sits in the heavens.

For though his long-suffering is astonishing, and many dare him to his face daily, with seeming impunity; yet he sometimes strikes a dreadful and unexpected blow, and gives an illustration of that solemn word, "Who ever hardened himself against the Lord, and prospered?" But who am I, to make this observation? I ought to do it with the deepest humiliation, remembering that I once stood (according to my years and ability) in the *foremost* rank of his avowed opposers; and with a determined and unwearied enmity—renounced, defied, and blasphemed him! "But he will have mercy on whom He will have mercy;" and therefore I was spared, and reserved to speak of his goodness.

Josephus, when speaking of the death of Herod Agrippa, ascribes it to a natural cause, and says, he was seized with excruciating pains in his intestines. But Luke informs us of the true cause—an angel of the Lord smote him! Had we a modern history, written by an inspired pen, we would probably often be reminded of such an interposition where we are not ordinarily aware of it. For though the springs of actions and events are concealed from us for the most part, and vain men carry on their schemes with confidence, as though the Lord had forsaken the earth; yet they are under his eye and control. Faith in some measure, instructed by the specimens of his government recorded in the Scripture, can trace and admire *his hand*, and can see how he takes the wise in their own craftiness, and stains the pride of human glory; and that, when sinners speak proudly, he is above them, and makes everything bend or break before him.

While we lament the growth and pernicious effects of infidelity, and see how wicked men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived; what gratitude should fill our hearts to Him, who has been pleased to call us out of the horrid darkness in which

multitudes are bewildered and lost—into the glorious light of His Gospel!

Faint are our warmest conceptions of this mercy. In order to understand it fully—we should have a full and adequate sense of the evil from which we are delivered; the glory to which we are called; and especially of the astonishing means to which we owe our great salvation—the humiliation, sufferings, and death of the Son of God!

But our views of these points, while in our present state—are and must be exceedingly weak. We know them but in part, we see but a dim reflection of them. And though they are faithfully represented in the mirror of God's Word, to us they appear indistinct, because we see them through a gross medium of ignorance and unbelief.

In heavenly glory, every veil shall be removed; and we shall fully know—the unspeakable evil of sin, and the unsupportable dreadfulness of God's displeasure against it, when we see the world in flames, and hear the final sentence denounced upon the ungodly!

We shall have far other thoughts of **Jesus** when we see him as he is; and shall then be able to make a more affecting estimate of the love which moved him to be made a substitute and a curse for us. And we shall then know what great things God has prepared for those who love him. Then with transport, we shall adopt the queen of Sheba's language, "It was a true report we heard in yonder dark world; but, behold, the half, the thousandth part, was not told us!" In the mean time, may such conceptions as we are enabled to form of these great truths, fill our hearts, and be mingled with all our thoughts and all our concerns. May the Lord, by faith, give us an abiding evidence of the reality and importance of these eternal realities—so shall we be enabled to live above the world while we are in it, uninfluenced either by its blandishments or its frowns; and, with a noble simplicity

and singularity, avow and maintain the cause of God in truth, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He whom we serve is able to support and protect us; and he well deserves at our hands, that we should be willing to endure, for his sake, much more than he will ever permit us to be exercised with.

You are not indeed called to serve God quite alone; but among those of your own rank, and with whom the station in which he has placed you—how few are there who can understand or approve, the principles upon which you act, or easily bear a conduct which must impress conviction, or reflect dishonor upon themselves! But you are not alone; the Lord's people (many of whom you will not know until you meet them in glory) are helping you here with their prayers; his angels are commissioned to guard and guide your steps; yes, the Lord himself fixes his eye of mercy upon your private and your public path, and is near you at your right hand, that you may not be moved! That he may comfort you with the light of his countenance, and uphold you with the arm of his power, is my frequent prayer.

Thought on the *Ice-palace*

January 20, 1775

Dear sir,

We have entered upon another year! So have thousands, perhaps millions—who will not see it close! An alarming thought to the worldling! at least it should be so. I have an imperfect remembrance of an account I read, when I was a boy, of an *ice palace*, built one winter at Petersburg. The walls, the roof, the floors, the furniture, were all of ice—but finished with taste; and everything that might be expected in a royal palace was to be found there; the ice, while in the

state of water, being previously colored, so that to the eye all seemed formed of proper materials; but all was cold, useless, and transient. Had the frost continued until now, the palace might have been standing; but with the returning spring it melted away, like the baseless fabric of a vision. No contrivance could exhibit a fitter illustration of *the vanity of life*. Men build and plan as if their work were to endure forever; but the wind passes over them—and they are gone! In the midst of all their preparations, or at farthest when they think they have just completed their designs, their final breath departs, they return to their earth; in that very day their thoughts perish! "How many sleep—who kept the world awake!"

Yet this ice-house had something of a leisurely dissolution; though, when it began to decay, all the art of man was unable to stop it. But often *death comes hastily*, and destroys to the very foundations without previous notice. Then all we have been concerned in here (all—but the *consequences* of our conduct, which will abide to eternity) will be no more to us than the *remembrance of a dream*. This truth is too plain to be denied; but the greater part of mankind act as if they were convinced it was false—they spend their days in vanity, and in a moment they go down to the grave! What cause of thankfulness have those, who are delivered from this delusion; and who, by the knowledge of the glorious Gospel, have learned their true state and end; are saved from the love of the present world, from the heart-distressing fear of death; and know, that, if their earthly house were dissolved, like the ice-palace, they have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!

Yet even these are much concerned to realize the *brevity* and *uncertainty* of their present state, that they may be stimulated to make the most and the best of it; to redeem their time, and manage their precarious opportunities, so as may most tend to the praise and

glory of Him who has called them out of darkness, into marvelous light. Why should any, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, wish to live another day—but that they may have the honor to be fellow-workers with him, instrumental in promoting His designs, and of laying themselves out to the utmost of their abilities and influence in his service?

To enjoy a sense of His loving-kindness, and to have the light of his countenance lifted up upon our souls, is indeed, respecting ourselves, the best part of life, yes, better than life itself! But this we shall have to unspeakably greater advantage, when we have finished our course, and shall be wholly freed from the body of sin. And therefore the *great desirable* while here on earth, seems to be grace, that we may serve him and suffer for him in the world. Though our first wish immediately upon our own accounts might be, to depart and be with Jesus—yet a lively thought of our immense obligations to his redeeming love, may reconcile us to a much longer continuance here, if we may by any means be subservient to diffuse the glory of His name, and the blessings of his salvation, which is God's great and principal end in preserving the world itself.

When historians and politicians descant upon the rise and fall of empires, with all their professed sagacity, in tracing the connection between causes and effects—they are totally unacquainted with the *great master-wheel* which manages the whole movement; that is, the Lord's design in favor of his church and kingdom. To this every event is subordinate; to this every interfering interest must stoop. How easily might this position be proved, by reviewing the history of the period about the Reformation.

I doubt not, but some who are yet unborn will hereafter clearly see and remark, that the present unhappy disputes between Great

Britain and America, with their consequences, whatever they may be, are part of a series of events, of which the extension and interests of the church of Christ were the principal final causes. In a word, that Jesus may be known, trusted, and adored—and sinners, by the power of his Gospel, be rescued from sin and Satan, is comparatively the one great business, for the sake of which the succession of day and night, summer and winter, is still maintained. And when the *plan of redemption is consummated*, sin, which now almost fills the earth, will then set it on fire; and the united interest of all the rest of mankind, when detached from that of the people of God, will not plead for its preservation a single day.

In this view, I congratulate you, that, however your best endeavors to serve the temporal interests of the nation may fall short of your wishes; yet, so far as your situation gives you opportunity of supporting the Gospel cause, and facilitating its progress—you have a prospect both of a more certain and more important success. For instance, it was, under God, that your favor and influence brought me into the ministry. And though I be nothing—yet he who put it into your heart to patronize me, has been pleased not to allow what you then did for his sake to be wholly in vain. He has been pleased, in a course of years, by so unworthy an instrument as I am, to awaken a number of people, who were at that time dead in trespasses and sins. And now some of them are pressing on to the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus; and some of them are already before the throne!

"What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world—yet loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:26. Should I suggest in some companies, that the conversion of a hundred sinners to God, is an event of more real importance than the temporal prosperity of the greatest nation upon earth—I would be

charged with ignorance and arrogance. But you are skilled in Scriptural arithmetic, which alone can teach us to estimate the value of souls, and will agree with me—that *one soul is worth more than the whole world, on account of its redemption price, its vast capacities, and its endless duration.*

Should we suppose a nation to consist of forty million people, and each individual to enjoy as much good as this life can afford, without abatement, for a term of fifty years each; all this good, or an equal quantity, might be exhausted by a single person in two thousand million years, which would be but a moment in comparison of the eternity which would still follow. And if this good were merely *temporal* good, the whole aggregate of it would be *evil* and *misery*—if compared with that happiness in God, of which only those who are made partakers of a Divine life are capable. On the other hand, were a whole nation to be destroyed by such accumulated miseries as attended the siege of Jerusalem, the sum total of these calamities would be but trifling, if set in competition with what every single person who dies in sin has to expect, when the sentence of *everlasting destruction*, away from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power, shall be executed.

What an unexpected round have my thoughts taken since I set out from the ice-palace!

Emptiness of the Creature

August 24, 1774.

Dear Sir,

You are going abroad; you will carry with you, I doubt not, the best

advice, strengthened by the authority and affection of parents whom you greatly love and greatly reverence. This may seem to make anything a stranger can offer unnecessary, if not impertinent. Yet, confiding in your candor, and in your good opinion of my intention, I shall venture to let my pen run on a little longer. Not only my wishes—but my hopes, are strong in your behalf. Perhaps there is hardly a young man in the kingdom, born to a fortune, who is setting out in life upon equal advantages with yourself. How many men of your years, who have been brought up in affluence—are unprincipled, uninstructed, and have already entered upon a course of dissipation and folly, in which it is impossible they themselves can find satisfaction, and which (unless they are reclaimed from it by an Almighty arm) will infallibly preclude them from usefulness or esteem! Whereas your early years have been successfully employed in the pursuit of knowledge, and your education formed under the most animating and endearing influence; and the Lord has furnished you with every natural ability of body and mind, which may qualify you to serve him in that situation of life which his Providence has allotted you.

What may I not then further hope from these beginnings, especially as it is easy to observe that He has given you an amiable and promising disposition of spirit; and has not only preserved you from being *hurried down the stream of a giddy world*—but enabled you to account the tender restraint under which you have been educated, not a yoke—but a privilege.

I sympathize with you, at what you will feel when you are first separated from your happy family. But the Lord God, who is the sun and shield of those who fear him, will be always near you. His favor is the one thing needful, which no outward advantages can

compensate the lack of; and the right knowledge of him is the one thing needful, which no human teaching can communicate.

Were I more intimate with you, I could have asked the question, and perhaps received the satisfaction to know, that you have already begun to consider him in this light; that you feel a vanity in science, an emptiness in creatures, and find that you have desires which only He who gave them can satisfy. I trust it either *is*—or *will* be thus.

As to **worldly education**, though it is useful when we know how to make a right use of it—yet, considered as in our own power, and to those who trust to it without seeking a superior guidance, it is usually the source of perplexity, strife, skepticism, and infidelity. It is, indeed, like a *sword in a madman's hands*, which gives him the more opportunity of hurting himself and others.

As to what the world calls **pleasure**, there is so little in it, that many of the philosophers of old—though they had little of value to substitute in its place, could despise it. You will perhaps meet with some who will talk another language; who will pretend to be too wise to submit to the Bible, and too happy in worldly things to expect or desire any happiness beside; but I trust you have seen enough to enable you to treat such people with the *pity*, and such pretensions with the *contempt* which they deserve.

Should we set our concerns with an eternal world aside for a moment, it would be easy to demonstrate that religion is necessary, in order to make the most of this life, and to enjoy temporal good with the highest relish. In such a world as this, where we are every moment liable to so many unforeseen and unavoidable contingencies, a man without religion may be compared to a ship in a storm, without either rudder, anchor, or pilot. But then, the religion, which only deserves the name, must come from above; it must be

suited to the state and wants of a sinner; it must be capable of comforting the heart; it must take away the sting and dread of death; and fix our confidence upon One who is always able to help us. Such is the religion of Jesus; such are its effects, and such are the criteria whereby we are to judge of the various forms and schemes under which it is proposed to us. But I forbear; I am only reminding you of what you know, and what you have known to be verified by living and dying examples. This happiness, my dear sir, is open to you, and to all who seek. He is enthroned in heaven—but prayer will bring him down to the heart. Indeed, he is always before-hand with us; and if we feel one desire towards him, we may accept it as a token that he gave it to us—to encourage us to ask for more.

May he who is your guide and guard—be with you at all times, and in all places, and bring you back to your father's house in peace. Should I live to see that day, you have few friends whose welcome would be warmer or more sincere than mine; and if, when you are settled and at leisure, you will afford me a letter—it will be both a pleasure and a favor to me.

All our Concerns are in His Hands

November 6, 1777.

My dear Sir,

You say you are more disposed to cry *misery* than *hallelujah*. Why not both together? When the treble is praise, and heart humiliation for the base, the melody is pleasant, and the *harmony* good. However, if not both together, we must have them alternately: not all

singing, not all sighing—but an interchange and balance, that we may be neither lifted too high—nor cast down too low—which would be the case if we were very *comfortable* or very *sorrowful* for a long continuance.

But though *we* change—the *Savior* changes not! All our concerns are in his hands, and therefore safe. His path is in the deep waters; his thoughts and methods of conduct are as high above ours—as the heavens are high above the earth; and he often takes a course for accomplishing his purposes, which is directly contrary to what our narrow views would prescribe. He wounds—in order to heal. He kills—that he may make alive. He casts down—when he designs to raise. He brings a death upon our feelings, wishes, and prospects—when he is about to give us the desire of our hearts. These things he does to test us; but he himself knows, and has determined before-hand, what he will do. The test indeed, usually turns out to our shame. Impatience and unbelief show their ugly heads, and prompt us to suppose this, that, and the other thing, yes perhaps all things, are against us; to question whether He is with us and for us, or not. But it issues likewise in the praise of his goodness, when we find, that, over all our unkind complaints and suspicions—he is still working wonderfully for us, causing light to shine out of darkness, and doing us good in defiance of ourselves!

The Impatient Patient

November 23, 1774.

My dear Sir,

I hope to be informed in due time—that the Lord has given you full health and cure. He has preserved me hitherto from the hands of

surgeons; but I feel as if my flesh would prove, as you say, a very coward, were it needful to submit to a painful operation. Yet I observe, when such operations are necessary, if people are satisfied of a surgeon's skill and prudence, they will not only yield to be cut at his pleasure, without pretending to direct him where, or how long, he shall make the incision—but will thank and pay him for putting them to pain, because they believe it for their advantage. I wish I could be more like them in my concerns.

My body, as I said, is, through mercy, free from considerable ailments—but I have a soul which requires surgeon's work continually: there is some tumor to be cut out, some dislocation to be reduced, some fracture to be healed, almost daily! It is my great mercy, that One who is infallible in skill, who exercises incessant care and boundless compassion towards all his patients, has undertaken my case! And, as complicated as it is, I dare not doubt his making a perfect cure! Yet, alas! I too often discover such impatience, distrust, and complaining, when under his hand; am so apt to find fault with the *instruments* he is pleased to make use of; so ready to think the beneficial wounds he makes are unnecessary, or too large. In a word, I show such a promptness to control, were I able, or to direct, his operations, that, were not his patience beyond expression, he would before now have given me up!

I am persuaded no money would induce any doctor to attend upon a patient who should act towards him—as I have towards my best Physician. Sometimes I indulge a hope that I am growing wiser, and think, "Surely, after such innumerable proofs as I have had, that he does all things well, I shall now be satisfied to leave myself quietly and without reserve to His disposal." A thousand such surrenders I have made, and a thousand times I have retracted them. Yet still he is gracious. Oh, how shall I praise him at last!

I thank you for your letter; I never receive one from you without pleasure, and, I believe, seldom without profit, at least for the time. I believe, with you, that there is much of the proper and designed efficacy of the Gospel mystery which I have not yet experienced; and I suppose those who are advanced far beyond me in the Divine life judge the same of their utmost present attainments. Yet I have no idea of any permanent state in this life—which shall make my experience cease to be a state of warfare and humiliation. At my first setting out, indeed, I thought to be better, and to feel myself better from year to year; I expected by degrees to attain everything which I then comprised in my idea of a *godly Christian*. I thought my grain of grace, by much diligence and careful improvement, would, in time, amount to a pound; that pound, in a farther space of time, to a talent; and then I hoped to increase from one talent to many; so that, supposing the Lord should spare me a number of years, I pleased myself with the thought of dying rich in grace.

But, alas! these my golden expectations have been like South-Sea dreams! I have lived hitherto a poor sinner, and I believe I shall die one! Have I then gained nothing by waiting upon the Lord? Yes, I have gained, that which I once would rather have been without, such accumulated proofs of the *deceitfulness* and *desperate wickedness* of my heart, as I hope, by the Lord's blessing, has, in some measure, taught me to know what I mean, when I say, "Behold I am vile!"

And, in connection with this, I have gained such experience of the wisdom, power, and compassion of my Redeemer; the need, the worth, of his blood, righteousness, attention, and intercession; the glory that he displays in pardoning iniquity and sin and passing by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage—that my soul cannot but cry out, "Who is a God like unto you!" Thus, if I have any lower thoughts of *myself*, Eze. 16:63, and any higher thoughts of *him* than I

had twenty years ago, I have reason to be thankful. Every grain of this experience is worth mountains of gold. And if, by his mercy, I shall yet sink more in my own esteem, and he will be pleased to rise still more glorious to my eyes, and more precious to my heart—I expect it will be much in the same way. I was ashamed when I began to seek him; I am more ashamed now; and I expect to be most of all ashamed when he shall appear to destroy my last enemy. But, oh! I may rejoice in him, to think that he will not be ashamed of me.

Trust in the Providence of God, and Benevolence to His Poor

My dear Friend,

The more I think of the point you proposed to me, the more I am confirmed to renew the advice I then gave. There is doubtless such a thing as Christian prudence; but, my friend, beware of counterfeits. Self-love, and the evil heart of unbelief, will endeavor to obtrude upon us a *prudence so called*, which is as opposite to the former as darkness to light. I do not say, that, now that you have a wife, and the prospect of a family, you are strictly bound to give to the poor in the same proportion as formerly. I say, you are not bound; for everything of this sort should proceed from a willing heart.

But if you should tell me the Lord has given you such a zeal for his glory, such a concern for the honor of the Gospel, such a love to his members, such a grateful sense of his mercies (especially by granting you, in this late instance of your marriage, the desire of your heart), and such an affiance in his providence and promises, that you find yourself very unwilling to be one sixpence in the year less useful than

you were before, I could not blame you or dissuade you from it. But I do not absolutely advise it; because I know not the state of your mind, or what measure of faith the Lord has given you. Only this I believe, that when the Lord gives such a confidence, he will not disappoint it.

When I look among the professors, yes, among the ministers of the Gospel, there are few things I see a more general lack of, than such a *trust in God as to temporals*, and such a sense of the honor of being permitted to relieve the necessities of his people, as might dispose them to a more liberal distribution of what they have at present in their power, and to a reliance on him for a sufficient supply in future. Some exceptions there are. Some people I have the happiness to know, whose chief pleasure it seems to be, to devise liberal things.

For the most part, we take care, first to be well supplied, if possible, with all the necessaries, conveniences, and not a few of the elegancies of life; then to have a snug fund laid up against a rainy day, as the phrase is, (if this is in an increasing way, so much the better), that when we look at children and near relatives, we may say to our hearts, "Now they are well provided for." And when we have got all this and more, we are perhaps content, *for the love of Christ*, to bestow a pittance of our superfluities, a tenth or twentieth part of what we spend or hoard up for ourselves, upon the poor! But, alas! what do we herein more than others? Multitudes, who know nothing of the love of Christ, will do thus much, yes, perhaps, greatly exceed us, from the mere feelings of humanity.

But it may be asked, would you show no regard to the possibility of leaving your wife or children unprovided for? Quite the reverse: I would have you attend to it very much, and behold the Scriptures show you the more excellent way. If you had a little money to spare,

would you not lend it to me, if I assured you it should be repaid when needed? I call point out to you better interest and better security than I could possibly give you: Pro. 19:17, "He who has pity upon the poor, lends unto the Lord: and that which he has given, will he pay him again." What do you think of this text? Is it the word of God, or not? Is he worthy of belief, or not? Is he able to make good his word, or is he not? I dare stake all my interest in your friendship (which I should be very reluctant to forfeit), that if you act upon this maxim, in a spirit of prayer and faith, and with a single eye to his glory, you shall not be disappointed. Read over Mat. 6:26-34. Shall we confine that reasoning and those promises to the primitive times? Say not, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, this thing might be." He has more ways to bless and prosper those who trust in him, than we are able to point out to him. But I tell you, my friend, *God will sooner make windows in heaven, turn stones into bread, yes, stop the sun in its course, than he will allow those who conscientiously serve him, and depend upon him, to be destitute.*

Some instances we have had of ministers who have seemed to transgress the bounds of strict prudence in their attention to the poor. But they have been men of faith, prayer, and zeal: if they did it, not from impulse, or a spirit of indolence, but from such motives as the Scripture suggests and recommends, I believe their families have seldom suffered for it. Besides, you know not what you may actually save in the course of years by this method. The Apostle, speaking of some abuses that obtained in the church of Corinth, says, "For this cause many are sick among you." If *prudence* should shut up your compassion (which I trust it never will), the Lord might a severe illness upon your family, which would perhaps cost you twice the money which would have sufficed to refresh his people, and to commend your ministry and character.

But if, after all, prudence will be heard, I counsel you to do these two things. First, **Be very certain that you allow yourselves in nothing superfluous.** You cannot, I trust, in conscience think of spending one penny more than is needful on yourself; unless you have another penny to help the poor. Then, secondly, Let your friends who are in good circumstances be plainly told, that, though you love them, prudence, and the necessary charge of a family, will not permit you to entertain them, no, not for a night. What! say you, shut my door against my friends? Yes, by all means, rather than against Christ. If the Lord Jesus was again upon earth, in a state of humiliation, and he, and the best friend you have, standing at your door, and your provision so strait that you could not receive both, which would you entertain? Now, he says of the poor, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me." Your friends have houses of their own, but the poor need relief. One would almost think that passage, Luk. 14:12-14, was not considered as a part of God's word; at least I believe there is no one passage so generally neglected by his own people. I do not think it unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words do not teach us, that it is in some respects our duty to give a preference to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them.

I was enabled to set out upon the plan I recommend to you, at a time when my certain income was much too scanty for my own provision, and before I had the expectation or promise of assistance from any person upon earth. Only I knew that the Lord could provide me with whatever he saw needful; and I trusted, that, if he kept me dependent upon himself, and desirous to live for his service only, he assuredly would do so. I have as yet seen no cause to repent it. I live upon his promise; for, as to any present ways or means, everything here below is so uncertain, that *I consider myself in the same situation with the birds of the air, who have neither storehouse nor barn.* Today I have

enough for myself, and something to impart to those who lack: as to futurity, the Lord must provide; and for the most part I can believe he will. I can tell you, however, that now and then my heart is pinched: unbelief creeps in, and *self* would much rather choose a strong box, or what the world calls a certainty, than *a life of absolute dependence upon the providence of God*. However, in my composed hours I am well satisfied. Hitherto he has graciously taken care of me; therefore may my heart trust in him, and not be afraid.

Consider, my friend, the Lord has done well for you likewise. He has settled you peaceably in a good and honorable employment; he has now answered your prayers, in giving you a partner, with whom you may take sweet counsel, one who will help and strengthen you in your best desires. Beware, therefore, of that reasoning which might lead you to distrust the Lord your God, or to act as if you did. You complain that *there is too much of an expensive taste among some people in your congregation*. If you set yourself to discountenance this, and should at the same time too closely shut up your hands, they will be ready to charge you with being governed by the same worldly spirit, though in another form. If you have been hitherto tender and bountiful to the poor, and should make too great and too sudden an alteration in this respect, if the blame should not fall upon you, it probably would upon your wife, who, I believe, would be far from deserving it. If the house which has been open to the poor in former times, should be shut against them, now that you live in it, would it not open the mouths of those who do not love your ministry, to say, that, notwithstanding all your zeal about doctrines, you know how to take care of your own selfish interest, the same as those whom you have thought indifferent and lukewarm in the cause of the Gospel? Would it not?—But I forbear. I know you need not such arguments. Yet consider how many eyes are upon you, watching for your halting.

Now, at your first setting out, is the proper time seriously to seek the Lord's directions, that you may from the beginning adopt such a plan as may be most for your own comfort, the honor of your character as a minister, the glory of him who has called you, and the edification of your people. *It is easier to begin well, than to make alterations afterwards.* I trust the Lord will guide and bless you in your deliberations. And for my own part, I am not in the least afraid that you will ever have cause to blame me for the advice I have given, if you should be disposed to follow it.

I have given you my opinion freely, and perhaps with an appearance of more strictness than is necessary. But I would apply our Lord's words in another case to this: "All men cannot receive this saying: he who is able to receive it, let him receive it." If the Lord has given you this confidence in his word, you are happy. It is better than the possession of thousands by the year.

Pliny's Letter to the Emperor Trajan

by John Newton

(The following is *Pliny's letter to the Emperor Trajan*—written just after the commencement of the second century)

It is a rule, sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts; for who is more capable of removing my scruples, or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any *trials concerning those who profess Christianity*, I am unacquainted not only with the nature of their crimes, or the measure of their punishment—but how far it is proper to enter into an examination

concerning them. Whether, therefore, any difference is usually made with respect to the *ages* of the guilty, or no distinction is to be observed between the young and the adult; whether repentance entitles them to a pardon; or, if a man has been once a Christian, whether it avails nothing to desist from his error; whether the profession of Christianity, unattended with any criminal act, or only the crimes themselves, inherent in the profession, are punishable—in all these points I am greatly doubtful.

In the mean while, the method I have observed towards those who have been brought before me as Christians, is this—I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed, I repeated the question twice again, adding threats at the same time; when, if they still persevered, I ordered them to be immediately punished; for I was persuaded, whatever the nature of their opinions might be, a contumacious and inflexible *obstinacy* certainly deserved correction.

There were others also brought before me, possessed with the same Christian profession—but, being citizens of Rome, I directed them to be carried there. But this *crime* spreading, while it was actually under prosecution!

An *information* was presented to me, without any name subscribed, containing a charge against several people, who, upon examination, denied they were Christians, or had ever been so. They repeated, after me, an invocation to the gods; and offered religious rites, with wine and frankincense, before your statue, (which for the purpose I had ordered to be brought) and even reviled the name of Christ. I thought proper, therefore, to discharge these.

Some among those who were accused by a witness in person, at first *confessed* themselves Christians—but immediately after *denied* it. And others owned indeed that they had been of that number

formerly—but had now forsaken their error. They all worshiped your statue, and the images of the gods, throwing out imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed, the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on Sundays, before it was light, and addressed themselves in a form of prayer to Christ, as to some God; binding themselves by a solemn oath—not for the purposes of any wicked design—and never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust, when they should be called upon to deliver it up. After which, it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to eat in common a harmless meal.

After receiving this account, I judged it so much the more necessary to endeavor to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to attend their religious functions; but I could discover nothing more than an absurd and excessive superstition.

I thought proper, therefore, to adjourn all further proceedings in this affair, in order to consult with you—for it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration; more especially as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these prosecutions, having already extended, and being still likely to extend, to people, of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. For this *contagious superstition* is not confined to the cities only—but has spread its infection among the country villages! Nevertheless, it still seems possible to remedy this evil, and restrain its progress.

The heathen temples, at least, which were almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and their sacred rituals, after a long intermission, are again revived; while there is a general demand for

the victims, which, for some time past, have met with but few purchasers.

From hence it is easy to imagine, what numbers might be reclaimed from this error—if a pardon were granted to those who shall repent.

REMARKS (by John Newton)

Several remarks easily offer from a perusal of this valuable monument of ecclesiastical antiquity, which I consider as affording us one of the most authentic testimonials of the *natural tendency of genuine Christianity*, and likewise a striking display of the unreasonableness and malignancy of the spirit by which it was then opposed, and by which it always will be opposed, (so far as the providence of God, and the circumstances of the times will permit it to act,) while the state of the *world* and of *human nature* continue as they are.

1. It appears, that the number of those who professed the Christian name, when Pliny was proconsul of Pontus and Bythynia, and particularly within the extent of his government, was very great; so great, that the heathen temples had been almost left desolate, and their sacrifices sunk into neglect. Pliny thought that such a general defection from the old religion rendered severities and punishments justifiable, and even necessary—yet, on the other hand, being a person of humanity, he was shocked and grieved when he reflected on the multitudes who were affected by such prosecutions, without distinction of rank, age, or gender.

Considering the many disadvantages to which the Christians had been exposed, especially under the reigns of *Nero* and *Domitian*, their great increase at the time of Pliny's writing, (which, at the

latest, could be but a few years after the commencement of the second century,) evidently proved, that the propagation and maintenance of the gospel is no way dependent upon the rank, titles, or acquired abilities of those who profess it—for, numerous as the Christians were, they were of so little note and esteem in the world, that Pliny, who was a scholar, a philosopher, and a gentleman, a curious inquirer into everything that was thought worthy of being known—was wholly unacquainted with the Christians, until his office obliged him to procure some information concerning them. He had an extensive acquaintance in Rome, having been many years in public life, and the Christians were very numerous there; but he appears only to have known that there was such a people; and that they were a deluded and contemptible people, who deserved all that they suffered, for their obstinacy. The very name of *Christian* was then odious and reproachful; and when, in succeeding ages, it became general and fashionable, other *disgraceful epithets* were substituted to stigmatize the faithful servants of God, and to point them out to the scorn or rage of the world.

2. Multitudes, who had been willing to be thought Christians in a time of *peace*, renounced their profession when they could no longer maintain it without the hazard of their lives. The terms of safety were to pray to the heathen gods, to offer wine and incense to the statue of the emperor, and to blaspheme Christ—which, Pliny was rightly informed, no true Christian could be prevailed on to comply with. Yet, in fact, when the persecution was sharp, so many yielded, that the cause seemed visibly to decline. The heathen temples, which had been almost forsaken, were again frequented, the rituals revived, and the demand for victims greatly increased. It is plain, therefore, that there were, even in those primitive times, *many superficial Christians*, destitute of that saving faith and love which are necessary to perseverance, in the face of dangers and death.

Of course, it is no new thing for men to desert the profession of the truth, to which they have formerly appeared to be attached; through the *fear of man*, or the *love of the world*. These are the *stony-ground hearers*; and our Lord has assured us, that such would be found, wherever his gospel should be preached. But there were others, who, having experienced this gospel to be the power of God unto salvation, were faithful witnesses, and could neither be *intimidated* nor *flattered* into a *compliance with evil*.

It is the same at this day—for, though we are mercifully exempted from the terror of penal laws—yet the temptations arising from worldly interest, and the prevalence and force of evil customs, will sooner or later be too hard for all professors who have not received that faith which is of the operation of God, which, by communicating a sense of the constraining love of Christ—is alone able to purify the heart from selfish and sinful principles, and to overcome the world with all its allurements and threatenings!

3. We have, in this epistle, an honorable testimony to the conduct and practice of the *Christians* in Pliny's time. Though the information of enemies and apostates was admitted, and even sought for, and those who were inclined to speak in their favor, were put to the torture—we see, that in the declaration of this heathen Pliny—that nothing is laid to their charge which was in any degree deserving of just blame. Though their meetings were accounted an offence against the *state*, they are acquitted of any *criminal* transactions. On the contrary, it is said, that they bound themselves by the strictest obligations against the commission of immorality, and to the faithful discharge of family duties. An engagement of this kind, among any other people, Pliny would have approved and admired. But the nature of their *religious* worship, which he censures as a dangerous and immoderate superstition, he thought sufficiently criminal in

itself, notwithstanding its influence upon their *conduct* was confessedly commendable.

To such *inconsistencies* are the wisest men reduced, who have the least degree of frankness in their opposition to the people of Christ. While they ignorantly condemn their *principles*, they are compelled to bear witness in favor of their general *deportment* which is formed upon those principles; and which, experience shows, no other principles can uniformly produce. It is true, the Christians were often unjustly charged with the greatest immoralities—but not by people of reputation and judgment like Pliny, who were careful to inquire into the truth of what they related.

At present, we who know what foul aspersions are propagated against the despised professors of the gospel—do not think it necessary to attempt a *formal refutation* of them; because, as we fear the authors of such slanders are incorrigible, so we are persuaded with regard to others, that there are very few people (however they may mistake our *sentiments*) so ignorant or credulous, as seriously to think them worthy of credit.

4. The object of divine worship, in their assemblies, was the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Sunday, they met early in the morning to sing hymns to his praise; not in commemoration of a mortal benefactor or lawgiver—but as to God; acknowledging, by this practice, their firm persuasion of that great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, and that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. That they met before it was light, was most probably to avoid the notice and fury of their persecutors. The enemies of Christ may put those who know and love him to many difficulties and inconveniences; but they cannot wholly prevent them from assembling in his name, unless they confine them in prisons or

chains! The reason is, they honor him as God, and are assured that he is present where two or three are met in his name, at all times and in all places. Their dependence for support, direction, and deliverance, is entirely upon him. And when they worship him according to his will, he manifests himself unto them as he does not unto the world. This they believe, experience, and profess—and the hardships they will submit to, rather than be deprived of such opportunities, is a proof that they are not disappointed in their expectations from him; especially if it is considered, that there have been few ages in which a succession of his people have not been pressed with the like trials for adhering to him.

But no power or policy could ever effectually prevent meetings to honor and serve him, among those who were fully persuaded that he is their God and their Savior. Bishop Bonner, in Queen Mary's reign, who was better versed in the *arts of persecution* than in the history of the church, mistook these Christians, whom Pliny describes, for heretics, and charged Philpot with being altogether like them; a charge which the good man received as a great honor.

5. The severity with which the persecution was carried on under Trajan, appears from the doubt proposed by Pliny, whether he was at liberty to make any *allowance* in particular cases—or must punish all alike who were guilty of bearing the Christian name, without paying the least regard to gender, age, rank, or circumstance. Though desirous to show lenity—he did not think himself authorized to reject the most invidious or private accusations; nor even to accept of a recantation, without the emperor's express warrant. It is plain that he considered the mitigations he proposed, as a deviation from the ordinary course of proceeding against them.

History scarcely affords an instance of such undistinguished rage exerted against any people, upon any occasion, except against those who have been punished for righteousness' sake, though they indeed have often been exposed to similar treatment, both from heathens, and professed Christians. In cases of sedition, or even rebellion against civil government, though many perhaps suffer, the greater number usually obtain mercy. The devouring sword of war seldom preys upon the defenseless, upon tender youth, or hoary old age, or women. Some bounds are set by the feelings of humanity, to the carnage of a field of battle—but when the native enmity of the heart, against those of whom the world is not worthy, is permitted to act without restraint—it acknowledges no distinctions, it feels no compassion—but, like the insatiable fire, consumes *whatever* it can reach!

If there are some exceptions, a few people of gentle natural dispositions, who are unwilling to shed blood, and rather express their dislike by a contemptuous pity—this is chiefly to be ascribed to the power of God over the heart of man; and he sometimes makes use of these to check the violence of the others. Such a one was Pliny; he had no esteem for the Christians, he despised them as *deluded enthusiasts*, and he was angry with them for what he deemed their obstinacy—yet the *greatness* of their sufferings, and the *number* of the sufferers, gave him some concern, and made him interpose in their favor, so far as to prevent them from being industriously sought out, or punished without witnesses or proof.

6. The chief or only crime of the Christians, in the judgment of Pliny, was, their steadiness in maintaining a cause which the emperor did not approve, and continuing their Christian assemblies after they had been prohibited by his edict—for this audacity and presumption,

he counted them deserving of the heaviest punishment, however blameless they were in other respects.

It must be allowed, that, as the *edicts of the Roman emperors* had at that time the force of law—that the profession of Christianity, when forbidden by those edicts, was illegal, and, if the penalties they suffered were prescribed by the edict, and they were tried and condemned under the same forms as were usually observed in other criminal processes, they suffered according to law.

Thus it appeared to Pliny; and though, in his *private* capacity, he might *pity* the offenders—yet, as a *governor* and a *judge*, he thought it his duty to give sentence according to the rule prescribed to him.

At this distance of time, and while we keep in view that the persecutors were heathens, we can readily plead in behalf of the Christians. The obstinacy they were charged with, was no other than a commendable regard to the superior authority of God. In all things not inconsistent with their duty to their supreme Lord—they were peaceable and obedient subjects to the emperor. But, to agree to the worship of idols, to burn incense to the statue of a man, to abjure the name of Jesus who had redeemed them from hell, or willfully to neglect his commands—these things they could not do without sin—and therefore they choose to suffer.

We approve their determination, and admire their constancy. But a question naturally arises upon this subject, namely, Whether God is the *Lord of the conscience* under a *heathen* government only? Or whether any man, or set of men, who own the *Christian* name, can have a better right than Trajan had, to compel men to act contrary to the light of their minds, or to punish them for a refusal?

As true Christians have always, by the influence of his grace, extorted from the more sober part of their adversaries, a confession in favor of their moral and peaceable conduct, they have been usually proceeded against, upon the *principle* which influenced Pliny—not so much for the singularity of their religious tenets and usages, which are pretended to be so weak and absurd as to excite *contempt* rather than anger; but for their *pertinacity* in persisting to maintain them, contrary to the laws and injunctions which have been contrived for their suppression.

There have been men, in most ages of the church, whose *ambition and thirst of power* have been gratified by thus *tyrannizing over the consciences of their fellow-creatures*, or (if they could not prevail over conscience) over their liberty, fortunes, and lives; and they have, by flattery or misrepresentation, had but too much success in engaging the authority of the government to support their evil designs. How many instances might we quote, from the history of kings and rulers, who in other respects have sought the welfare of their people, who—yet being misled to esteem it as a branch of their prerogative, to dictate *in what manner God shall be worshiped*, and what points shall be received as *articles of faith*—have crowded the annals of their reigns with misery, in the calamities which their ill-judged measures have brought upon their subjects.

A *uniformity of modes in religion* has been enforced, as though it were the most desirable object of government; though it may be proved, that to prescribe, under the severest penalties, a uniformity of rituals, would hardly be more unreasonable in itself, or more injurious to the peace and rights of society. Sometimes the servants of God have been traduced as people hostile to the government, because they cannot adopt or approve such institutions as are directly subversive of the faith and obedience they owe to the Lord!

Thus the prophet was charged by Amaziah, the high-priest of Bethel, "Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent a message to King Jeroboam: *Amos is hatching a plot against you right here on your very doorstep! What he is saying is intolerable. It will lead to rebellion all across the land!*" Amos 7:10.

At other times, new laws have been enacted, purposely to ensnare or distress them. Thus, when the enemies of *Daniel* were convinced that they could find no crime against him, except concerning the law of his God; by flattering the pride of Darius, they obtained a decree, which, according to their expectation, gave Daniel up into their power as a *criminal against the state*. May we be duly thankful to God, and to the government under which we live, for the valuable privilege of **religious liberty**, and that we can worship him according to the light of our consciences, and assemble together in His name where and when we please, none being permitted to persecute us!

Extract of a Letter to a Student in Divinity

Dear Sir,

The subject of your last is important. I can sympathize with your concern, having known much of it myself, and therefore willingly devote my first opportunity to reply. But shall I indeed condole with you? or shall I rather congratulate you on the perplexity you complain of? I know it is not pleasing; but I hope it will be sanctified and profitable to you.

Though I am no enemy to the acquisition of useful knowledge, I have seen many instances of young men who have been much hurt by

what they expected to reap advantage from. **They have gone to the academy humble, peaceable, spiritual, and lively; but have come out self-wise, dogmatically, censorious, and full of a wisdom founded upon the false maxims of the world.** I have been ready to address them with that line of Milton: "If you are he— But ah! how fallen!"

I do not mention this as the *necessary* fault of the institution, but as *the frequent effect of notions too hastily picked up, when not sanctified by grace, nor balanced by a proportional depth of spiritual experience.* I am therefore glad to hear, that, notwithstanding the advantages you have had in the pursuit of your studies, you feel an inward conviction, that *you still need something which you cannot receive from men or books,* in order to complete your fitness for the ministry: that you may be "a workman who needs not to be ashamed," and enabled rightly to divide (to distinguish and distribute) the word of truth.

It seems to me a point of more curiosity than use, to inquire too nicely into the modus of the Holy Spirit's assistance in the composure and delivery of sermons. If we cannot exactly state the boundaries between what we may deem the result of our own thoughts, and the needful influence of the Holy Spirit, it seems a safe way to give him the honor of the whole, and to attribute nothing to ourselves but our infirmities. If we have a capacity, means for improvement, diligence to make use of those means, and if that diligence is attended with any degree of success; may we not acknowledge that the former links of this chain are the effect of his goodness and favor, no less than the latter?

To the question, How far is it lawful to expect this assistance of the Holy Spirit? I answer, It is lawful very far, even to lay the whole

stress upon it, so as to be firmly persuaded that we can neither meditate nor speak to purpose without it; that if we have not this assistance, whatever else we have, or may think we have, we shall but "darken counsel by words without knowledge." For this, I think, I have warrant in Joh. 15:5. If any person supposes he has so far mastered a system of divinity, that though he can indeed do better with the Spirit's assistance, yet he can make a tolerable shift without it, I envy him not this attainment. But if the question intends, *How far a depend-once upon the Holy Spirit may lawfully supersede the use of means?* I answer, Not in the least. The blessing and the means are so closely united, that they cannot be separated. The blessing may be surely expected, if diligently sought in the use of proper means, and we have no just reason to expect it without them. But to clear up the whole, let it be considered, What may deserve the name of diligence in this matter? and what are the proper means?

By **diligence**, I understand spiritual diligence. Such an active, improving, industrious habit, as is peculiar to a heart impressed with some real abiding sense of the love of God, the worth of souls, the shortness of time, and the importance of eternity. Without this turn of mind, though a man should spend sixteen hours every day in his study, he may be a mere trifler. The greatest part of his application will be spent on what is least necessary; and his knowledge will chiefly prove of that sort which puffs up, without communicating any real benefit: Gen. 41:21; Psa. 127:2.

The chief means for attaining wisdom, and suitable gifts for the ministry, are the holy Scriptures, and prayer. The one is the fountain of living water, the other the bucket with which we are to draw. And I believe you will find, by observation, that the man who is most frequent and fervent in prayer, and most devoted to the word of God, will shine and flourish above his fellows. Next to these,

and derived from them, is **meditation**. By this, I do not mean a stated exercise upon some one particular subject, but *a disposition of mind to observe carefully what passes within us and around us, what we see, hear, and feel*, and to apply all for the illustration and confirmation of the written word to us. In the use of these means, and a humble dependence upon the Lord in all the changing dispensations we pass through, our spiritual experience will enlarge: and this experience is the proper fund of our ministerial capacity, so far as it may be considered inherent in us: Pro. 16:23; Mat. 13:52; 1Jo. 1:3.

These means are of universal importance. The wisest can do nothing without them, the weakest shall not use them in vain. There are likewise subordinate means, which may be healthful, and should in general be attended to: yet they ought not, I apprehend, to be considered as a *sine qua non* in a minister's call and fitness. The first preachers had them not, and some in the present day are enabled to do well without them.

Under this head, I principally intend all that comes under the usual designation of **literature**. A competent acquaintance with the learned languages, history, natural philosophy, &c. is very desirable. If these things are held in a proper subservience, if they do not engross too much of our time, nor add fuel to the fire of that *self-importance which is our great snare*; they may contribute to increase and enlarge our ideas, and facilitate our expressing ourselves with propriety. But these attainments (like riches) are attended with their peculiar temptations; and unless they are under the regulation of a sound judgment, and a spiritual frame of mind, will prove (like Saul's armor to David) rather cumbersome than useful in preaching. The sermons of preachers thus qualified are

often more ingenious than edifying, and rather *show off the preacher*, than commend the Gospel of Christ.

As you desire my advice with respect to your future studies, I shall comply without hesitation or ceremony. The *original Scriptures* well deserve your pains, and will richly repay them. There is doubtless a beauty, fullness, and spirit, in the originals, which the best translations do not always express. When a word or phrase admits of various senses, the translators can only preserve one; and it is not to be supposed, unless they were perfectly under the influence of the same infallible Spirit, that they should always prefer the best. Only be upon your guard lest you should be tempted to think, that, because you are master of the grammatical construction, and can tell the several acceptations of the words in the best authors, you are therefore and thereby master of the spiritual sense likewise. This you must derive from your experimental knowledge, and the influence and teaching of the Spirit of God.

Another thing which will much assist you, in composing and speaking properly and acceptably, is **logic**. This will teach you what properly belongs to your subject, and what may be best suppressed; and likewise, to explain, divide, enumerate, and range your ideas to advantage. A lax, immethodical, disproportionate manner, is to be avoided. Yet beware of the contrary extreme. An affected starchiness and over-accuracy will fetter you, will make your discourses lean and dry, preclude an useful variety, and savor more of the school-lamp, than of that heavenly fire which alone can make our meditations efficacious, and profitable either to ourselves or our hearers. The proper medium can hardly be taught by rule; experience, observation, and prayer, are the best guides.

As your inquiry seems chiefly to be, how to fill up your outlines. I would advise you to study the living as well as the dead, or rather more. Converse much with experienced Christians and exercised souls. You will find advantage in this respect, not only from the wise, but from the weak of the flock. In the course of your acquaintance, you will meet with some in a backsliding state, some under temptations, some walking in darkness, others rejoicing in the light, &c. Observe how their spirits work, what they say, and how they reason in their several cases; what methods and arguments you find most successful in comforting the feeble-minded, raising up those who are cast down, and the like, and what answers they return. Compare these with the word of God, and your own heart. What you observe of ten people in these different situations, may be applied to ten thousand. For **though some circumstances vary, the heart of man, the aids of grace, and the artifices of Satan, in general, are universally the same.** And whenever you are to preach, remember, that some of all these sorts will probably be before you, and each should have something said to their own peculiar ease.

The *tempted and distressed* will be most probably relieved by opening the various states and exercises of the heart, and by showing, from scriptural and other examples, that no new thing has befallen them. The *careless and backsliders*, who have made a profession, should be reminded of that blessedness they once spoke of, and warned of their danger. Those who are now upon the mount, should be cautioned to expect a change, and to guard against security and spiritual pride. To the dead in trespasses and sins (some such will be always present), it is needful so preach the spirituality and sanction of the law, that they may be stirred up to seek to Jesus. Of him all awakened souls love to hear much. Let Jesus therefore be your capital subject. If you discuss some less essential topic, or bend

all your strength to clear up some dark text, though you should display much learning and ingenuity, you will probably fall short of your main design, which I dare say will be to promote the glory of God, and the good of souls.

You will likewise find advantage, by attending as much as you can on those preachers whom God has blessed with much power, life, and success in their ministry. And in this you will do well not to confine yourself to any denomination or party, for the Spirit of the Lord is not confined. Different men have different gifts and talents. I would not wish you to be a slavish admirer of any man. *Christ alone is our Master and Teacher.* But study the excellencies of each: and if you observe a fault in any (for no human models are perfect), you will see what you are yourself to avoid.

Your inquiries respecting my own experience on this subject, must be answered very briefly. I have long since learned, that **if I was ever to be a minister, faith and prayer must make me one.** I desire to seek the Lord's direction, both in the choice and management of subjects; but I do not expect it in a way of extraordinary impulse, but in endeavoring to avail myself, to the best of my judgment, of present circumstances. *The converse I have with my people, usually suggests what I am to preach to them.* At first, my chief solicitude used to be, what I should find to say: I hope it is now, rather that I may not speak in vain. *For the Lord has sent me here, not to acquire the character of a great speaker, but to win souls to Christ, and to edify his people.* As to preparation, I make little use of books, excepting the Bible and a concordance. Though I preach without notes, I most frequently write more or less upon the subject. Often when I begin, I am at a loss how I shall proceed; but one thing insensibly offers after another, and, in general, I believe the best and most useful parts of my sermon occur *de novo* while I

am preaching. *When I can find my heart in frame and liberty for prayer, every thing else is comparatively easy.*

I should be very glad if anything I have offered may afford you satisfaction. The sum of my advice is this: Examine your heart and views. Can you appeal to Him who knows all things, concerning the sincerity of your aim, that you devote yourself to the work of the ministry, not for worldly regards, but with a humble desire to promote the Redeemer's kingdom? If so, and his providence has thus far concurred with you, trust him for your sufficiency of every kind, and he will not disappoint you, but will be near to strengthen you according to your day. **Depend not upon any cisterns you can hew out for yourself, but rejoice that you have liberty to come to the fountain that is always full, and always flowing.** You must not expect a mechanical sufficiency, such as artificers acquire by habit and exercise in their business. When you have preached well nineteen times, this will be no security for the twentieth. Yes, when you have been upheld for twenty years, should the Lord withhold his hand, you would be as much at a loss as at first. If you lean upon books or men, or upon your own faculties and attainments, you will be in fear and in danger of falling continually. But if you stay yourself upon the Lord, he will not only make good your expectations, but in time will give you a proper confidence in his goodness, and free you from your present anxiety.

One thing more I must mention as belonging to the subject: That a comfortable freedom for public service depends much upon the spirituality of our walk before God and man. **Wisdom will not dwell with a trifling, an assuming, a censorious, or a worldly spirit.** But if it is our business, and our pleasure, to contemplate Jesus, and to walk in his steps, he will bless us: we shall

be like trees planted by a constant stream, and he will prosper the work of our hands.

Enjoyment of the Pleasures of the Present Life

True religion is necessary, in order to the best enjoyment of the pleasures of the present life.

Dear Sir,

Though I truly love you, and have no reason to doubt of the reality of your friendship to me; yet I cannot but apprehend, that notwithstanding our mutual regard, and my frequent attempts to be witty (if I could) for your diversion, there is a something in most of my letters (which I cannot, dare not wholly suppress) that disgusts and wearies you, and makes you less inclined to keep up a frequent fellowship than you would otherwise be. Rather than lose you, I will spare you as much as I can; but at present you must bear with me, and allow me full scope. You have given me a challenge, which I know not how to pass over; permit me for this time to preach again, and to take some passages in your letter for my text.

In the present debate I will accept your compliment, and suppose myself to be, as you say, a man of sense. You allow, then, that all the sense is not on your side. This, indeed, you cannot deny; for whatever becomes of me, it is needless to tell you, that Hale, Boyle, and other great names I could mention, were men of as great penetration and judgment, had as good opportunities and took as much pains to be informed of the truth, as any of the advocates for infidelity can pretend to. And you cannot, with any modesty or

consistence, absolutely determine that they had not as good grounds for thinking themselves right, as you can have for concluding they were wrong.

But, declining the advantage of human authority, I am content the point should rest between you and me. And here I beg you to observe, that I have one evident advantage over you in judging, namely, that *I have experienced the good and evil on both sides*, and you only on one side. If you were to send me an inventory of your pleasures; how charmingly your time runs on, and how dexterously it is divided between the coffee-house, play-house, the card-table, and tavern, with intervals of balls, concerts, etc.; I would answer, that most of these I have tried over and over, and know the utmost they can yield, and have seen enough of the rest, most heartily to despise them all. I profess I had rather be a worm crawling on the ground, than to bear the name of 'man' upon the poor terms of whiling away my life in an insipid round of such insignificant and unmanly trifles!

I will return your own expression—I believe you to be a person of sense; but, alas! how do you prostitute your talents and capacity, how far do you act below yourself, if you know no higher purpose of life than these childish dissipations, together with the more serious business of rising early and sitting up late to amass money, that you may be able to enlarge your expenses! I am sure, while I lived in these things I found them unsatisfying and empty to the last degree; and the only advantage they afforded (miserable are those who are forced to deem it an advantage) was, that they often relieved me from the trouble and burden of thinking. If you have any other pleasures than these, they are such as must be evil and inconvenient even upon your own plan; and therefore my friendship will not allow me to bring them into the account. I am willing to hope you do not stoop still lower in pursuit of satisfaction. Thus far we stand upon

even ground. You know all that *a life of pleasure* can give, and I know it likewise.

On the other hand, if I should attempt to explain to you the source and streams of my best pleasures—such as a comfortable assurance of the pardon of my sins, a habitual communion with the God who made heaven and earth, a calm reliance on the Divine Providence, the cheering prospect of a better life in a better world, with the pleasing foretastes of heaven in my own soul; should I, or could I, tell you the pleasure I often find in reading the Scripture, in the exercise of prayer, and in that sort of preaching and conversation which you despise;—I doubt not but you would think as poorly of my happiness as I do of yours. But here lies the difference, my dear friend; you condemn that which you have never tried. You know no more of these things than a blind man does of colors; and, notwithstanding all your flourishes, I defy you to be at all times able to satisfy yourself that things may not possibly be as I have represented them.

Besides, what do I lose upon my plan, that should make me so worthy of your pity? Have you a quicker relish in the prudent use of temporal comforts? Do you think I do not eat my food with as much pleasure as you can do, though perhaps with less cost and variety? Is your sleep sounder than mine? Have not I as much satisfaction in social life? It is true, to join much with the mirthful, fluttering tribe, who spend their days in laugh and sing-song, is equally contrary to my duty and inclination. But I have friends and acquaintance as well as you. Among the many who favor me with their esteem and friendship, there are some who are people of sense, learning, wit, and (what perhaps may weigh as much with you) of fortune and distinction. And if you should say, "Yes, but they are all enthusiasts like yourself," you would say nothing to the purpose; since, upon your maxim, that "happiness is according to opinion," it cannot be an

objection, but the contrary, to have my acquaintance to my own taste. Thus much for the brighter side of your situation.

Let me add one thing more: I know you have thoughts of marriage: do you think, if you should enter into this relation, your principles are calculated to make you more happy in it than I am? You are well acquainted with our family life. Do you propose to know more of the peace and heart-felt joy of domestic union than I have known, and continue to know to this hour? I wish you may equal us; and if you do, we shall still be as before, but upon even ground, I need not turn Deist, to enjoy the best and the most that this life can afford.

But I need not tell you, that the present life is not made up of pleasurable incidents only. Pain, sickness, losses, disappointments, injuries, and affronts with men; will, more or less, at one time or other, be our lot. And can you bear these trials better than I? You will not pretend to it. Let me appeal to yourself: How often do you toss and disquiet yourself, like a wild bull in a net, when things cross your expectations? As your thoughts are more engrossed by what you see, you must be more keenly sensible of what you feel. You cannot view these trials as appointed by a wise and heavenly Father in subservience to your good; you cannot taste the sweetness of his promises, nor feel the secret supports of his strength in an hour of affliction; you cannot so cast your burden and care upon him, as to find a sensible relief to your spirit thereby; nor can you see his hand engaged and employed in effecting your deliverance. Of these things you know no more than of the art of flying; but I seriously assure you, and I believe my testimony will go farther with you than my judgment, that they are realities, and that I have found them to be so. When my worldly concerns have been most thorny and discouraging, I have once and again felt the most of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

However, I may state the case still lower. You do pretty well among your friends; but how do you like being alone? Would you not give something for that happy secret, which could enable you to pass a rainy day pleasantly, without the assistance of business, company, or amusement? Would it not mortify you greatly to travel for a week in an unfrequented road, where you should meet with no lively incidents to recruit and raise your spirits? Alas! what a poor scheme of pleasure is yours, that will not support an interval of reflection!

What you have heard is true; I have a few friends who meet at my house once a week, and we spend an hour or two in worshipping the God who made us. And can this move your indignation, or your compassion? Does it show a much nobler spirit, a more refined way of thinking, to live altogether without God in the world? If I kept a card-party at those times, it would not displease you. How can you, as a person of sense, avoid being shocked at your own unhappy prejudice? But I remember how it was once with myself, and forbear to wonder. May He who has opened my eyes, open yours! He only can do it. I do not expect to convince you by anything I can say as of myself; but if God is pleased to make use of me as his instrument, then you will be convinced. How would I then rejoice! I would rejoice to be useful to anyone, but especially daily to you, whom I dearly love. May God show you your true self, and your true taste; then you will attentively listen to what you disdain to hear of—his goodness in providing redemption and pardon for the chief of sinners, through him who died upon the cross for sins not his own. Keep this letter by you at my request; and when you write, tell me that you receive it in good part.

A Believer's Frames

Dear Sir,

You ask me, in your letter, what should one do when one finds one's self always still, quiet, and stupid—except in the pulpit; is made useful there, but cannot get either comfort or sorrow out of it, or but very rarely? You describe a case which my own experience has made very familiar to me. I shall take the occasion to offer you a few miscellaneous thoughts upon the subject of a believer's frames; and I send them to you, not by the post, but from the press; because I apprehend the exercise you speak of is not peculiar to you or to me, but is in a greater or less degree the burden of all who are spiritually minded, and duly attentive to what passes in their own hearts, whether they are in the ministry or not.

As you intimate that you are in the main favored with liberty and usefulness in the pulpit, give me leave to ask you, What you would do if you did not find yourself occasionally poor, insufficient, and, as you express it, stupid, at other times? Are you aware of what might be the possible, the probable, the almost certain consequences, if you always found your spirit enlarged, and your frames lively and comfortable? Would you not be in great danger of being puffed up with spiritual pride? Would you not be less sensible of your absolute dependence upon the power of Christ, and of your continual need of his blood, pardon, and intercession? Would you not be quite at a loss to speak suitably and feelingly to the case of many gracious souls, who are groaning under those effects of a depraved nature, from which, upon that supposition, you would be exempted? How could you speak properly upon the deceitfulness of the heart, if you did not feel the deceitfulness of your own; or adapt yourself to the changing experiences through which your hearers pass, if you yourself were always alike, or nearly so? Or how could you speak pertinently of the inward warfare, the contrary principles of flesh and spirit fighting

one against another—if your own spiritual desires were always vigorous and successful, and met with little opposition or control?

The Apostle Paul, though favored with a singular eminency in grace, felt at times that he had no sufficiency in himself so much as to think a good thought; and he saw there was a danger of his being exalted above measure, if the Lord had not wisely and graciously tempered his dispensations to prevent it. By "being exalted above measure," perhaps there may be a reference not only to his spirit, lest he should think more highly of himself than he ought, but likewise to his preaching, lest, not having the same causes of complaint and humiliation in common with others, he should shoot over the heads of his hearers, confine himself chiefly to speak of such comforts and privileges as he himself enjoyed, and have little to say for the refreshment of those who were discouraged and cast down by a continual conflict with indwelling in.

The angel who appeared to Cornelius did not preach the Gospel to him, but directed him to send for Peter: for though the glory and grace of the Savior seems a fitter subject for an angel's powers than for the poor stammering tongues of sinful men, yet an angel could not preach experimentally, nor describe the warfare between grace and sin from his own feelings. And if we could suppose a minister as full of comforts and as free from failings as an angel, though he would be a good and happy man, I cannot conceive that he would be a good or useful preacher; for he would not know how to sympathize with the weak and afflicted of the flock, or to comfort them under their difficulties with the consolations wherewith he himself, in similar circumstances, had been comforted of God.

It belongs to your calling of God as a minister, that you should have a taste of the various spiritual trials which are incident to the Lord's

people, that thereby you may possess the tongue of the learned, and know how to speak a word in season to those who are weary; and it is likewise needful to keep you perpetually attentive to that important admonition, "Without me you can do nothing."

Thus much considering you as a minister. But we may extend the subject so as to make it applicable to believers in general. I would observe, therefore, that it is a sign of a sad declension, if one, who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, should be capable of being fully satisfied with anything short of the light of his countenance, which is better than life. A resting in notions of Gospel truth, or in the recollection of past comforts, without a continual thirst for fresh communications from the Fountain of life, is, I am afraid, the canker which eats away the beauty and fruitfulness of many professors in the present day; and which, if it does not prove them to be absolutely dead, is at least a sufficient evidence that they are lamentably sick. But if we are conscious of the desire, if we seek it carefully in the use of all appointed means, if we willingly allow ourselves in nothing which has a known tendency to grieve the Spirit of God, and to dampen our sense of divine things; then, if the Lord is pleased to keep us short of those comforts which he has taught us to prize, and, instead of lively sensations of joy and praise, we feel a languor and deadness of spirit, provided we do indeed feel it, and are humbled for it—we have no need to give way to despondency or excessive sorrow.

Still the foundation of our hope, and the ground of our abiding joys, is the same; and the heart may be as really alive to God, and grace as truly in exercise, when we walk in comparative darkness and see little light, as when the frame of our spirits is more comfortable. **Neither the reality, nor the measure of grace, can be properly estimated by the degree of our sensible comforts.** The great question is—How we are practically influenced by the word

of God, as the ground of our hope, and as the governing rule of our tempers and conversation? The Apostle exhorts believers to rejoice in the Lord always. He well knew that they were exposed to trials and temptations, and to much trouble from an evil heart of unbelief; and he prevents the objections we might be ready to make, by adding, "And again I say, Rejoice," as if he had said, I speak upon mature consideration; I call upon you to rejoice, not at some times only, but at all times; not only when upon the mount, but when in the valley; not only when you conquer, but while you are fighting; not only when the Lord shines upon you, but when he seems to hide his face. When he enables you to do all things, you are no *better* in yourselves than you were before; and when you feel you can do nothing, you are no *worse*. *Your experiences will vary: but his love and promises are always unchangeable.*

Though our desires of comfort, and what we call lively frames, cannot be too importunate while they are regulated by a due submission to his will, yet they may be inordinate for lack of such submission. Sinful principles may, and too often do, mix with and defile our best desires. I have often detected the two vile abominations Self-will and Self-righteousness insinuating themselves into this concern: like Satan, who works by them, they can occasionally assume the appearance of an angel of light. I have felt an impatience in my spirit, utterly unsuitable to my state as a sinner and a beggar, and to my profession of yielding myself and all my concerns to the Lord's disposal. He has mercifully convinced me that I labor under a multiplication of disorders, summed up in the word—sin. He has graciously revealed himself to me as the infallible physician; and has enabled me, as such, to commit myself to him, and to expect my cure from his hand alone. Yet how often, instead of thankfully accepting his prescriptions, have I foolishly and presumptuously ventured to prescribe to him, and to point out how I

would have him deal with me! How often have I thought something was necessary which he saw best to deny, and that I could have done better without those dispensations which his wisdom appointed to work for my good! He is God, and not man, or else he would have been weary of me, and left me to my own management long ago. How inconsistent! to acknowledge that I am blind, to entreat him to lead me, and yet to want to choose my own way, in the same breath! I have limited the Holy One of Israel, and not considered that he magnifies his wisdom and grace in working by contraries, and bringing good out of apparent evil. It has cost me something to bring me to confess that he is wiser than I; but I trust, through his blessing, I have not suffered wholly in vain. My sensible comforts have not been great: the proofs I have had of the evils of my sinful nature, my incapacity and aversion to good, have neither been few nor small; but by these unpromising means I hope he has made his grace and salvation precious to my soul, and in some measure weaned me from leaning to my own understanding.

Again: self-righteousness has had a considerable hand in dictating many of my desires for an increase of comfort and spiritual strength. I have wanted some stock of my own. I have been wearied of being so perpetually beholden to him, necessitated to come to him always in the same strain, as a poor miserable sinner. I would have liked to have done something for myself upon common occasions, and to have depended upon him chiefly upon extraordinary occasions. I have found indeed, that I could do nothing without his assistance, nor anything even with it, but what I have reason to be ashamed of. If this had only humbled me, and led me to rejoice in his all-sufficiency, it would have been well. But it has often had a different effect, to make me sullen, angry, and discontented, as if it was not best and most desirable that he should have all the glory of his own work, and I should have nothing to boast of, but that in the Lord I

have righteousness and strength. I am now learning to glory only in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; to be content to be nothing, that he may be All in All. But I find this a hard lesson; and when I seem to have made some proficiency, a slight turn in my spirit throws me back, and I have to begin all over again.

There is an inseparable connection between causes and effects. There can be no effect without a cause, no active cause without a proportionable effect. Now indwelling sin is an active cause; and therefore, while it remains in our nature, it will produce effects according to its strength. Why then should I be surprised, that, if the Lord suspends his influence for a moment, in that moment sin will discover itself? Why should I wonder that I can feel no lively exercise of grace, no power to raise my heart to God, any farther than he is pleased to work in me mightily; any more than wonder that I do not find fire in the bottom of a well, or that it should not be day when the sun is withdrawn from the earth? Humbled I ought to be, to find I am so totally depraved; but not discouraged, since Jesus is appointed to me as my wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and since I find that, in the midst of all this darkness and deadness, he keeps alive the principle of grace which he has implanted in my heart.

As to Mr. Rutherford's expression which you mention, that "there is no temptation like being without temptation;" I allow it in a qualified sense; that is, it is better of the two to suffer from Satan's fiery darts, than to be lulled asleep, and drawn into a careless security, by his more subtle, though less perceptible devices; so as to grow indifferent to the means of grace, and sink into a worldly spirit, or, like the church of Laodicea, to imagine ourselves rich, and increased in goods, and that we have need of nothing. But I am persuaded this is not your case; the deadness you complain of, and which is a

burden you groan under, is a very different thing. And I advise you to be cautious how you indulge a desire to be exercised with Satan's temptations, as supposing they would be conducive to make you more spiritual, or would of course open you a way to greater consolations. If you have such a desire, I may say to you, in our Lord's words, "you know not what you ask."

He who knows our weakness, and the power of our adversary, has graciously directed us to pray, that we enter *not* into temptation. Have you considered what the enemy can do, if he is permitted to come in like a flood? In one hour he could raise such a storm as would put you to your wit's end. He could bring such a dark cloud over your mind, as would blot out all remembrance of your past comforts, or at least prevent you from deriving the least support from them. He could not only fight against your peace, but shake the very foundations of your hope, and bring you to question, not only our interest in the promises, but even to doubt of the most important and fundamental truths upon which your hopes have been built. Be thankful, therefore, if the Lord restrains his malice. A young sailor is often impatient of a short calm; but the experienced mariner, who has been often tossed with tempests, and upon the point of perishing, will seldom wish for a storm. in a word, let us patiently wait upon the Lord, and be content to follow as he leads, and he will surely do us good.

A Sketch of the Christian's Temper

September, 1776

Dear sir,

Without any preamble, I purpose now to give you a few thoughts on

the meaning of that name which first obtained at Antioch—in other words, *what it is to be a Christian?* What are the effects, which (making allowance for the unavoidable infirmities attending upon the present state of mortality) may be expected from a real experimental knowledge of the Gospel? I would not insinuate that none are Christians, who do not come up to the character I would describe; for then I fear I should unchristian myself. I only will consider what the Scripture encourages us to aim at—as the prize of our high calling in this life. It is generally allowed and lamented, that we are too apt to live below our privileges, and to stop short of what the Spirit and the promises of the Gospel point out to us as attainable.

Mr. Pope's admired line, "An **honest** man—is the noblest work of God," may be admitted as a truth, when rightly explained. A Christian is the noblest work of God in this visible world, and bears a much brighter impression of his glory and goodness—than the sun in the skies; and none but a Christian can be strictly and properly honest—all others are too much under the power of *self*, to do universally to others—as they would like others would do unto them; and nothing but an uniform conduct upon this principle deserves the name of honesty.

The Christian is a **new creature**, born and taught from above. He has been convinced of his guilt and misery as a sinner, has fled for refuge to the hope set before him, has seen the Son and believed on him. His natural prejudices against the glory and grace of God's salvation, have been subdued and silenced by Almighty power. He has accepted the Beloved, and is made acceptable in him; he now knows the Lord; has renounced the confused, distant, uncomfortable notions he once formed of God; and beholds him in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, the only door by which we can enter

to any true satisfying knowledge of God, or communion with him. He now sees God in Christ, reconciled, a Father, a Savior, and a Friend, who has freely forgiven him all his sins, and given him the Spirit of adoption. He is now no longer a servant, much less a stranger—but a son; and because a son, an heir already savingly interested in all gospel promises, admitted to the throne of grace, and an assured expectant of eternal glory!

The Gospel is designed to give us not only a *perhaps*, or a probability—but a *certainty* both of our acceptance and our perseverance, until death shall be swallowed up in life. And though many are sadly fluctuating and perplexed upon this head, and perhaps all are so for a season; yet there are those who can say, we know that we are of God; and therefore they are steadfast and unmovable in his way; because they are confident that their labor shall not be in vain—but that, when they shall be absent from the body, they shall be present with their Lord. This is the state of the advanced, experienced Christian, who, being enabled to make his profession the chief business of his life, is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Everyone who has this hope in Christ, purifies himself, even as he is pure. I would now attempt **a sketch of the Christian's temper**, formed upon these principles and hopes, under the leading branches of its exercise, respecting God, himself, and his fellow-creatures.

The Christian's temper *God-ward* is evidenced by **humility**. He has received from Gethsemane and Golgotha, such a sense of the evil of sin, and of the holiness of God, combined with his matchless love to sinners, as has deeply penetrated his heart. He has an affecting remembrance of the state of rebellion and enmity in which he once lived against this holy and good God. And he has a quick perception of the defilements and defects which still debase his best services. His mouth is therefore stopped as to boasting—he is vile in his own

eyes, and is filled with wonder that the Lord should visit such a sinner, with such a salvation! He sees so vast a disproportion between the obligations he is under to grace—and the returns he makes, that he is disposed, yes constrained, to adopt the Apostle's words without affectation, and to account himself less *than the least of all saints!* Knowing his own heart, while he sees only the outside of others—he is not easily persuaded there can be a believer upon earth—so faint, so unfruitful, so unworthy as himself.

Yet, though abased, he is not discouraged, for he enjoys peace. The dignity, offices, blood, righteousness, faithfulness, and compassion of the Redeemer—in whom he rests, trusts, and lives—for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—are adequate to all his wants and wishes—and provide him with an answer to every objection, and give him no less confidence in God, than if he were as sinless as an angel! For he sees, that, though *sin* has abounded in *him*—grace has much more abounded in Jesus!

With respect to the *past*, all things are become new. With respect to the *present* and *future*—he leans upon an Almighty arm, and relies upon the word and power which made and upholds the heavens and the earth. Though he feels himself unworthy of the smallest mercies—he claims and expects the greatest blessings which God can bestow; and, being rooted and grounded in the knowledge and love of Christ, his peace abides, and is not greatly affected, either by the variation of his own emotional frames, or the changes of God's dispensations towards him while here. With such a sense of himself, such a heart-felt peace and heavenly hope—how can his spirit but breathe love to his God and Savior?

It is indeed the perfection of his character and happiness, that his soul is united by love to the chief good. The love of Christ is the joy of

his heart, and the spring of his obedience. With his Savior's presence, He finds a heaven begun upon earth; and without it, all the other glories of the heavenly state would not content him. He realizes the excellence of Christ; his love to sinners, especially his dying love; Christ's love to himself, in seeking and saving him when lost, and saving him to the uttermost! But I must stop. You can better *conceive*—than I can describe—how and why Jesus is dear to the heart that knows him.

That part of the Christian's life which is not employed in the active service of his Lord, is chiefly spent in seeking and maintaining communion with him. For this he plies the throne, and studies the Word of grace, and frequents the ordinances, where the Lord has promised to meet with his people. These are his golden hours; and when thus employed, how poor and trivial does all that the world calls great and important appear in his eyes! Yes, he is solicitous to keep up a fellowship of heart with his Beloved in his busiest scenes; and so far as he can succeed, it alleviates all his labors, and sweetens all his troubles. And when he is neither communing with his Lord, nor acting for him—he accounts his time lost, and is ashamed and grieved.

The truth of his love for Jesus—is manifested by *submission*. This is twofold, and absolute and without reserve in each. He submits to his ***revealed will***, as made known to him by precept, and by Christ's own example. He aims to tread in his Savior's footsteps, and makes conscience of all his commandments, without exception and without hesitation. Again, he submits to his ***providential will***—he yields to his sovereignty, acquiesces in his wisdom; he knows that he has no right to complain of anything, because he is a hell-deserving sinner; and he has no reason to complain, because he is sure that the Lord does all things well. Therefore this submission is not forced—but is

an act of trust. He knows he is not more *unworthy* than he is *unable* to choose for himself, and therefore rejoices that the Lord has undertaken to manage for him! And were he compelled to make his own choice, he could only choose that all his concerns should remain in that hand to which he has already committed them.

And thus he judges of public as well as of his personal affairs. He cannot be an unaffected spectator of national sins, nor without apprehension of their deserved consequences; he feels, and almost trembles, for others—but he himself dwells under the shadow of the Almighty, in a sanctuary which cannot be forced into; and therefore, should he see the earth shaken, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea—his heart would not be greatly moved, for God is his refuge; the Lord reigns! He sees his Savior's hand directing every dark appearance, and over-ruling all—to the accomplishment of his own great purposes. This satisfies him; and though the winds and waves should be high, he can venture his own little bark in the storm, for he has an infallible and almighty *Pilot* on board with him!

And, indeed, why should he fear, when he has nothing to lose? His best concerns are safe; and other things he holds as gifts from his Lord, to whose call he is ready to resign them, in whatever way he pleases; well knowing, that creatures and instruments cannot of themselves touch a hair of His head without the Lord's permission; and that if he does permit them, it must be for the best.

I might enlarge farther. But I shall proceed to consider the Christian's temper respecting **himself**. He lives godly and soberly. By sobriety we mean more than that he is not a drunkard; his tempers toward God, of course, form him to a *moderation in all temporal things*. He is not scrupulous or superstitious; he understands the liberty of the Gospel, that every creature of God is

good, if it is received with thanksgiving: he does not aim at being needlessly singular, nor practice self-devised austerities. The Christian is neither a Stoic nor a Cynic—yet he finds daily cause for watchfulness and restraint.

Satan will not often tempt a believer to gross crimes—our greatest snares and sorest conflicts are usually found in things lawful in themselves—but hurtful to us by their abuse, engrossing too much of our time, or of our hearts, or somehow indisposing us for communion with the Lord. The Christian will be jealous of anything which might entangle his affections, dampen his zeal, or straiten him in his opportunities of serving his Savior.

He is likewise **content with his situation**, because the Lord chooses it for him. He is not eager for additions and alterations in his circumstances. If Divine Providence points out and leads to a change—he is ready to follow, though it should be what the world would call from a better to a worse; for he is a pilgrim and a stranger here, and a citizen of heaven. As wealthy people sometimes, in traveling, submit cheerfully to inconvenient accommodations, very different from their homes, and comfort themselves with thinking they are not always to live so—so the Christian is not greatly solicitous about *external circumstances*. If he has them, he will use them moderately. If he has but little of them, he can make a good shift without them. He is but upon a journey—and will soon be at home! If he is rich, experience confirms our Lord's words, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15. This satisfies him. He knows that a large room, a crowd of servants, and twenty dishes upon his table, add nothing to the real happiness of life—therefore he will not have his heart set upon such things.

If he is in a poorer state, he is more disposed to *pity* than to *envy* these above him; for he knows that they must have many encumbrances from which he is freed. However, the will of God, and the light of his countenance, are the chief things the Christian, whether rich or poor, regards; and therefore his *moderation* is made known unto all men.

A third branch of the Christian's temper respects his **fellow-creatures**. And here, methinks, if I had not filled a sheet already, I could enlarge with pleasure. We have, in this degenerate day, among those who claim and are allowed the name of Christian, too many of a narrow, selfish, mercenary spirit—but in the beginning it was not so. The Gospel is designed to cure such a spirit—but gives no indulgence to it. A Christian has the mind of Christ, who went about doing good, who makes his sun to shine upon the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. His Lord's example forms him to the habit of *diffusive benevolence*. He breathes a spirit of goodwill to mankind, and rejoices in every opportunity of being useful to the souls and bodies of others, without respect to parties or interests. He commiserates, and would if possible alleviate, the miseries of all around him. And if his actual services are restrained by lack of ability—yet all share in his *sympathy* and *prayers*.

Acting in the spirit of his Master, he frequently meets with a measure of the like treatment; but if his good is requited with evil—he labors to overcome evil with good. He feels himself to be a sinner—who needs much forgiveness; this makes him ready to forgive. He is not haughty, faultfinding, easily offended, or hard to be reconciled; for at the feet of Jesus he has learned *meekness*. When he meets with unkindness or injustice, he considers, that, though he has not deserved such things from men—that they are *instruments* employed by his Heavenly Father (from whom he has deserved to suffer much

more), for his humiliation and chastisement; and is therefore more concerned for their welfare, than for his own sufferings, and prays, after the pattern of his Savior, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" He knows he is fallible; therefore cannot be dogmatic. He knows he is frail; and therefore dares not be censorious.

As a member of society, he is just, and punctual in the discharge of every relative duty, faithful to his engagements and promises, rendering to all their dues, obedient to lawful authority, and acting to all men according to the golden rule, of doing to others—as he would like to be treated by them. His conduct is simple, devoid of artifice, and consistent, attending to every branch of duty. In the closet, the family, the church, and in the transactions of common life, he is the same man; for in every circumstance he serves the Lord, and aims to maintain a conscience void of offense in his sight.

A great part of the beauty of his profession in the sight of men, consists in the due government of his **tongue**. The law of truth, and kindness, and purity, is upon his lips. He abhors lying; and is so far from inventing a slander, that he will not repeat a report to the disadvantage of his neighbor, however true, without a necessary reason. His converse is cheerful—but inoffensive; and he will no more wound another with his *wit* (if he has a talent that way), than with a *knife*. His speech is with grace, seasoned with salt, and suited to promote the peace and edification of all around him.

Such is the Christian in *civil* life. But though he loves all mankind, he stands in a nearer relation, and bears an especial brotherly love, to all who are partakers of the faith and hope of the Gospel. This regard is not confined within the pale of a denomination—but extended to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He calls no man

master himself; nor does he wish to impose a Shibboleth of His own upon others. He rejoices in the image of God, wherever he sees it, and in the work of God, wherever it is carried on. Though tenacious of the truths which the Lord has taught him, his heart is open to those who differ from him in less essential points, and allows to others that *right of private judgment* which he claims for himself, and is disposed to hold communion in love, with all who hold the Head.

He cannot indeed countenance those who set aside the one foundation which God has laid in Zion, and maintain errors derogatory to the honor of his Savior, or subversive of the faith and experience of his people; yet he wishes well to them, pities and prays for them, and is ready in meekness to instruct those who oppose. But there is no bitterness in his zeal, being sensible that raillery and invective are dishonorable to the cause of truth, and quite unsuitable in the mouth of a sinner, *who owes all that distinguishes him from the vilest of men to the free grace of God!* In a word, he is influenced by the wisdom from above, which, as it is pure, is likewise peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

I must just recur to my first head, and observe, that, with this spirit and deportment, the Christian, while he is enabled to maintain a conscience void of offense towards God and man, is still sensible and mindful of indwelling sin. He has his eye more upon his *rule* than upon his *attainments*; and therefore finds and confesses that in everything he comes exceedingly short, and that his best services are not only defective—but defiled. He accounts himself an unprofitable servant; and is abased in his own eyes. He derives all his hope and comfort, as well as his strength—from Jesus, whom he has known, received and loved, and to whom he has committed his soul. He

renounces all confidence in the flesh, and esteems all things as loss—compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ his Lord, for whose sake he has lost all things—considering them rubbish, that he may gain Christ!

I beg a remembrance in your prayers, that He who has given me to will and desire, may work in me to be and to do according to his own good pleasure.

I was Once blind, but Now I See

Dear Sir,

The question, "What is the discriminating characteristic nature of a work of grace upon the soul?" has been upon my mind; if I am able to give you satisfaction concerning it, I shall think my time well employed.

The reason why men in a natural state are utterly ignorant of spiritual truths is, that they are wholly destitute of a faculty suited to their perception. A remarkable instance we have in the absurd construction which Nicodemus put upon what our Lord had spoken to him concerning the new birth. And in the supernatural communication of this spiritual faculty, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, I apprehend the inimitable and abiding criterion, which is the subject of our inquiry, does primarily consist. Those passages of Scripture wherein the Gospel truth is compared to light, lead to a familiar illustration of my meaning. Men by nature are stark blind with respect to this light; by grace, the eyes of the understanding are opened.

Among a number of blind men, some may be more ingenious and of better capacity than others. They may be better qualified for such studies and employment's which do not require eye-sight than many who can see, and may attain to considerable skill in them; but with respect to the true nature of light and colors, they are all exactly upon a level. A man born blind, if ingenious and inquisitive, may learn to talk about the light, the sun, or the rainbow, in terms borrowed from those who have seen them; but it is impossible that he can have a just idea of either; and whatever hearsay knowledge he may have acquired, he can hardly talk much upon these subjects without betraying his real ignorance. The case of one blind person has been often quoted. He believed, that, after much inquiry and reflection, he had at last found out what scarlet was; and being asked to explain himself, "I think," says he, "scarlet is something like the sound of a trumpet." This man had about the same knowledge of natural light as Nicodemus had of spiritual. Nor can all the learning or study in the world, enable any person to form a suitable judgment of divine truth, until the eyes of his mind are opened, and then he will perceive it at once. Indeed, this comparison is well suited to show the entire difference between nature and grace, and to explain the ground of that enmity and scorn which fills the hearts of blinded sinners, against those who profess to have been enlightened by the Spirit of God.

But if we could suppose it possible, that there was a whole nation of blind men, and one or two people should go among them, and profess that they could see, while they could not offer them such a proof of their assertion as they were capable of receiving, nor even explain, to their satisfaction, what they meant by *sight*; what may we imagine would be the consequence? I think there is little doubt but these innovators would experience much the same treatment as the believers of Jesus often meet with from a blind world. The blind

people would certainly hate and despise them for presuming to pretend to what they had not. They would try to dispute them out of their senses, and bring many arguments to prove that there could be no such thing as either light or sight. They would say, as many say now, 'How is it, if these things are so, that we should know nothing of them?' Yes, I think it probable they would rise against them, as deceivers and enthusiasts, and disturbers of the public peace, and say, "Away with such fellows from the earth; it is not fit that they should live!" But if we should suppose further, that during the heat of the contest some of these blind men should have their eyes suddenly opened, the dispute as to them would be at an end in a minute; they would confess their former ignorance and obstinacy, confirm the testimony of those whom they had before despised, and of course share in the same treatment from their blind brethren, perhaps be treated still worse, as apostates from the opinion of the public.

If this illustration is justly applicable to our subject, it may lead us to several observations, or inferences, which have a tendency to confirm what we are elsewhere expressly taught by the word of God.

In the first place, it shows, that *regeneration*, or that great change without which a man cannot see the kingdom of God, is *the effect of Almighty power*. Neither education, endeavors, nor arguments, can open the eyes of the blind. It is God alone, who at first caused light to shine out of darkness, who can shine into our hearts, "to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." People may attain some natural ideas of spiritual truths by reading books, or hearing sermons, and may thereby become wise in their own conceits; they may learn to imitate the language of an experienced Christian; but they know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm, and are as distant from the true meaning of the terms, as a blind man who pronounces the words blue or red, is from the ideas

which those words raise in the mind of a person who can distinguish colors by his sight.

And from hence we may infer the *sovereignty*, as well as the *efficacy* of grace; since it is evident, not only that the objective light, the word of God, is not afforded universally to all men; but that those who enjoy the same outward means have not all the same perceptions. There are many who stumble in the noon-day, not for lack of light, but for lack of eyes; and those who now see, were once blind even as others, and had neither power nor will to enlighten their own minds. It is a mercy, however, when people are so far sensible of their own blindness, as to be willing to wait for the manifestation of the Lord's power, in the ordinances of his own appointment. He came into the world, and he sends forth His Gospel, that those who see not may see; and when there is a desire raised in the heart for spiritual sight, it shall in his due time be answered.

From hence likewise we may observe the proper use and value of the preaching of the Gospel, which is the great instrument by which the Holy Spirit opens the blind eyes. Like the rod of Moses, it owes all its efficacy to the appointment and promise of God. Ministers cannot be too earnest in the discharge of their office; it behooves them to use all diligence to find out acceptable words, and to proclaim the whole counsel of God. *Yet when they have done all, they have done nothing, unless their word is accompanied to the heart by the power and demonstration of the Spirit.* Without this blessing, an apostle might labor in vain: but it shall be in a measure afforded to all who preach the truth in love, in simplicity, and in all humble dependence upon him who alone can give success. This in a great measure puts all faithful ministers on a level, notwithstanding any seeming disparity in gifts and abilities. Those who have a lively and pathetic talent, may engage the ear, and raise the natural passions of their

hearers; *but they cannot reach the heart*. The blessing may be rather expected to attend the humble, than the voluble speaker.

Farther: we may remark, that there is a difference in kind between the highest attainments of *nature*, and the effects of *grace* in the lowest degree. Many are convinced, who are not truly enlightened; are afraid of the consequences of sin, though they never saw its evil; have a seeming desire of salvation, which is not founded upon a truly spiritual discovery of their own wretchedness, and the excellency of Jesus. These may, for a season, hear the word with joy, and walk in the way of professors; but we need not be surprised if they do not hold out—for they have no root. Though many such fall, the foundation of God still stands sure. We may confidently affirm, upon the warrant of Scripture, that those who, having for a while escaped the pollutions of the world, are again habitually entangled in them; or who, having been distressed upon the account of sin, can find relief in a self-righteous course, and stop short of Christ, "who is end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes"—we may affirm, that these, whatever profession they may have made, were never capable of perceiving the beauty and glory of the Gospel salvation.

On the other hand, though, where the eyes are divinely enlightened, the soul's first views of itself and of the Gospel may be confused and indistinct, like him who saw men as it were trees walking; yet this light is like the dawn, which, though weak and faint at its first appearance, shines more and more unto the perfect day. It is the work of God; and his work is perfect in kind, though progressive in the manner. He will not despise or forsake the day of small things. When he thus begins, he will make an end; and such people, however feeble, poor, and worthless, in their own apprehensions, if they have obtained a glimpse of the Redeemer's glory, as he is made unto

wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—so that his name is precious, and the desire of their hearts is towards him—have good reason to hope and believe, as the wife of Manoah did in a similar case, that if the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have showed them such things as these.

Once more: The spiritual sight and faculty is that which may be principally considered as permanent in a believer. He has no stock of grace, or comfort, or strength, in himself. He needs continual supplies; and if the Lord withdraws from him, he is as weak and unskillful after he has been long engaged in the Christian warfare, as he was when he first entered upon it. The eye is of little present use in the dark; for it cannot see without light. But the return of light is no advantage to a blind man. A believer may be much in the dark; but his spiritual sight remains. Though the exercise of grace may be low, he knows himself, he knows the Lord, he knows the way of access to a throne of grace. His frames and feelings may alter; but he has received such a knowledge of the person and offices, the power and grace, of Jesus the Savior, as cannot be taken from him; and he could withstand even an angel that should preach another gospel, because he has seen the Lord. The length of this paper constrains me to break off. May the Lord increase his light in your heart.

Blinded by Satan

April 20, 1774

Dear sir,

I have been pondering a good while for a subject, and at last I begin without one, hoping that (as it has often happened) while I am writing one line, something will occur to fill up another. Indeed, I

have an inexhaustible fund at hand; but it is to me often like a *prize in the hand of a fool*—I lack skill to improve it. O for a warm, a suitable, a seasonable train of thought, that might enliven my own heart, and not be unworthy your perusal! Methinks the poets can have but cold comfort, when they invoke a fabled muse; but we have a warrant, a right, to look up for the influence of the Holy Spirit, who ordains strength for us, and has promised to work in us. What a comfort, what an honor is this—that sinful worms have liberty to look up to God! and that he, the High and Holy One, who inhabits eternity, is pleased to look down upon us, to maintain our peace, to supply our needs, to guide us with his eye, and to inspire us with wisdom and grace suitable to our occasions! Those who profess to know something of this fellowship, and to depend upon it, are, by the world, accounted *enthusiasts*, who know not what they mean; or perhaps *hypocrites*, who pretend to what they have not, in order to cover some base designs. But we have reason to bear their reproaches with patience.

Well then may the believer say, Let them laugh, let them rage; let them, if they please, point at me for a fool as I walk the streets! If I do but take up the Bible, or run over in my mind the inventory of the blessings with which the Lord has enriched me—I have sufficient amends. Jesus is mine—in him I have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, a saving interest in all the promises and in all the perfections of God. He will *guide* me by his counsel, *support* me by his power, *comfort* me with his presence, while I am here; and afterwards, when flesh and heart fail—he will receive me to his glory!

Let them say what they will, they shall not dispute or laugh us out of our spiritual senses. If all the *blind men* in the kingdom should endeavor to bear me down, that the sun is not bright, or that the

rainbow has no colors, I would still believe my own eyes. I have seen them both—they have not. I cannot prove to their satisfaction what I assert, because they are destitute of *sight*, the necessary medium; yet their disputations produce no uncertainty in my mind. They would not question me, they could not hesitate a moment, if they were not blind. Just so, those who have been taught of God, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, have an *experimental perception* of the truth, which armors them against all the sophistry of infidels.

I am persuaded we have many plain people here, who, if a wise man of the world was to suggest that the Bible is a human invention, would be quite at a loss how to answer him by arguments drawn from external evidences; yet they have found such *effects* from this blessed book, that they would be no more moved by the insinuation, than if they were told that a clever man, or set of men, invented the sun, and placed it in the skies! So, if a wise Socinian was to tell them that the Savior was only a man like themselves, they would conceive just such an opinion of his skill in divinity, as a philosopher would do of a clown's skill in astronomy, who would affirm that the sun was no bigger than a cart-wheel.

It remains therefore a truth, in defiance of all the cavils of the ignorant, that the Holy Spirit does influence the hearts of all the children of God; or, in other words, they are inspired, not with new revelations—but with *grace* and *wisdom* to understand, apply, and feed upon the great things already revealed in the Scriptures, without which the Scriptures are as useless as *eye-glasses* to the blind. Were it not so, when we become acquainted with the poverty, ignorance, and wickedness of our hearts—we must sit down in utter despair of being ever able to think a good thought, to offer a single petition aright in prayer, or to take one safe step in the path of life. But now we may be content with our proper weakness, since the power and

Spirit of Christ are engaged to rest upon us; and while we are preserved in a simple dependence upon this help, though unable of ourselves to do anything, we shall find an ability to do everything that our circumstances and duty call for.

What is weaker than a worm? yet the Lord's "worm" shall, in his strength, "thresh the mountains, and make the hills as chaff!" But this life of faith, this living and acting by a power above our own, is an inexplicable mystery, until *experience* makes it plain.

I have often wondered that Paul has obtained so much quarter at the hands of some people, as to pass with them for a man of sense; for surely the greatest part of his writings must be, to the last degree, absurd and unintelligible upon their principles. How many contradictions must they find, for instance, if they give any attention to what they read in that one passage, Gal. 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

And as believers are thus inspired by the Holy Spirit, who furnishes them with *desires*, *motives*, and *abilities*, to perform what is agreeable to his will; so I apprehend, that those who live without God in the world, whom the Apostle styles sensual, not having the Spirit, are, in a greater or less degree, recipients, under what I may call a *black inspiration*. After making the best allowances I can, both for the extent of human genius, and the deplorable evil of the human heart, I cannot suppose that one half of the wicked wit, of which some people are so proud, is properly their own. Perhaps such a one as Voltaire would neither have written, or have been read or admired so much, if he had not been the amanuensis of an abler hand in his own way. *Satan* is always near, when the heart is disposed to receive

him and the Lord withdraws his restraints, to heighten the sinner's ability of sinning with a vengeance, and assisting him with such strokes of blasphemy, malice, and falsehood, as perhaps he could not otherwise have attained. Therefore I do not wonder that they are clever and smart, that they raise a laugh, and are received with applause among those who are like-minded with themselves.

But, unless the Lord is pleased to grant them repentance (though it is rather to be feared some of them are given up to *judicial hardness of heart*), how much better would it have been for them had they been born idiots or lunatics, than to be distinguished as the witty and successful instruments of the powers of darkness—in beguiling, perverting, and ruining the souls of men! Alas, what are abilities and talents, or any distinctions which give pre-eminence in life, unless they are sanctified by the grace of God, and directed to the accomplishment of his will and glory!

From the expression, "Bind them in *bundles* and burn them," I have been led to think, that the *deceivers* and the *deceived*; those who have prostituted their abilities or influence to encourage others in sin, and those who have perished by their means; may, in another world, have some peculiar and inseparable connection, and spend an eternity in fruitless lamentations that ever they were connected here on earth!

I doubt not, that you feel the force of that line:
"Oh to *grace* how great a debtor—
daily I'm constrained to be!"

Had not the Lord separated you for himself—your rank, your abilities, your influence, which now you chiefly value as enlarging your opportunities of gospel usefulness; might, nay certainly would, have been diverted into the opposite channel!

Our Divine Shepherd

November 5, 1774

Dear sir,

I have not very lately had recourse to the expedient of descanting upon a text, but I believe it the best method I can take, to give my thoughts upon a few obvious topics, which I suppose uniformly present themselves to my mind when I am about to write to you. Just now, that sweet expression of David occurred to my thoughts, "*The Lord is my Shepherd.*" Permit me, without plan or premeditation, to make a few observations upon it; and may you feel the peace, the confidence, the blessedness, which a *believing application* of the words is suited to inspire.

David had a **divine Shepherd**, whose wisdom and power were infinite; and might therefore warrantably conclude he should not lack, and need not fear. And we also may conclude the same, if our Shepherd is the Lord. Besides, the very nature of the Shepherd's office respecting the state of such frail creatures as we are, requires those attributes, for the due discharge of it, which are incommunicably Divine. He must intimately know every individual of the flock. His eye must be upon every one, and his ear open to their prayers, and his hand stretched out for their relief, in all places and in all ages. Every thought of every heart must be open to his view; and his wisdom must penetrate, and his arm control and over-rule, all the hidden and complicated machinations of the powers of darkness. He must have the administration of universal providence, over all the nations, families, and peoples upon earth, or he could not

effectually manage for those who put their trust in him, in that immense variety of cases and circumstances in which they are found.

Reason, as well as Scripture, may convince us, that he who gathers the outcasts of Israel, who heals the broken in heart, who upholds all that fall, raises up all that are bowed down, and upon whom the eyes of all wait for their support—can be no other than He who counts the number of the stars, and calls them all by their names, who is great in power, and whose understanding is infinite! To this purpose likewise, the prophet Isaiah describes this mighty Shepherd, Isaiah 40:9-17, both as to his person and office.

But is not this indeed, the great mystery of godliness? How just is the Apostle's observation, that no man can say, *Jesus Christ is the Lord*—but by the Holy Spirit! How astonishing the thought—that the Maker of heaven and earth, the Holy One of Israel, before whose presence the earth shook, the heavens dropped, when he displayed a faint emblem of his majesty upon Sinai, should afterwards appear in the form of a servant, and hang upon a cross, the sport and scorn of wicked men!

I cannot wonder, that to the wise men of the world this appears absurd, unreasonable, and impossible; yet to right reason, to reason enlightened and sanctified, however amazing the proposition be—yet it appears true and necessary, upon a supposition that a holy God is pleased to pardon sinners in a way suited to display the solemn glories of his justice. The same arguments which prove that the blood of bulls and goats is insufficient to take away sin, will conclude against the utmost doings or sufferings of men or angels. The Redeemer of sinners must be mighty; he must have a personal dignity, to stamp such a value upon his undertakings, as that thereby God may appear *just*, as well as *merciful*, in justifying the ungodly

for his sake; and he must be all-sufficient to bless, and almighty to protect—those who come unto him for safety and life.

Such a one is our Shepherd. This is He of whom we, through grace, are enabled to say—*we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture*. We are his by every tie and right: he made us, he redeemed us, he reclaimed us from the hand of our enemies; and we are his by our own voluntary surrender of ourselves; for though we once slighted, despised, and opposed him—he made us willing in the day of his power! He knocked at the door of our hearts; but we (at least I) barred and fastened it against him as much and as long as possible—but when he revealed his love, we could stand out no longer. Like sheep, we are weak, destitute, defenseless, prone to wander, unable to return, and always surrounded with wolves; but all is made up in the fullness, ability, wisdom, compassion, care, and faithfulness of our great Shepherd. He guides, protects, feeds, heals, and restores, and will be our guide and our God—even until death. Then he will meet us, receive us, and present us unto himself—and we shall be *near* him, and *like* him, and *with* him forever.

Ah! my friend, what a subject is this! I trust it is the joy of your heart. Placed as you are by his hand in a superior rank, you see and feel that the highest honors, and the most important concernments that terminate with the present life—are as trivial as the sports of children, in comparison with the views and the privileges you derive from the glorious Gospel. And your situation in life renders the grace bestowed upon you—the more conspicuous and distinguishing. I have somewhere met with a similar reflection of Henry the Fourth of France, to this purpose, that, though many came into the world the same day with him, he was probably the only one among them, who was born to be a king. Your Lordship is acquainted with many, who, if not born on the same day with you, were born to titles, estates, and

honors; but how few of them were born to the honor of making a public and consistent profession of the glorious Gospel! The hour is coming, when all honors and possessions—but this which comes from God alone, will be eclipsed and vanish, and, "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind." How miserable will they then be, who must leave their all!

But grace and faith can make the lowest state of life supportable, and make a dismissal from the highest state of life desirable. Of the former I have many living proofs and witnesses around me. Your Lordship, I trust, will have sweet experience of the latter, when, after having fulfilled the will of God in your generation, you shall be called (I hope in some yet distant day) to enter into your Master's joy. In the mean time, how valuable are life, talents, influence, and opportunities of every kind—if we are enabled to improve and lay out all for him who has thus loved us, thus provided for us!

As to myself, I would hope there are few, who have so clear a sense of their obligations to him, who make such unsuitable and languid returns as I do. I think I have a desire to serve him better; but, alas! evil is present with me. Surely I shall feel something like shame and regret for my coldness, even in heaven; for I find I am never happier—than when I am most ashamed of myself upon this account here.

Will the Sins of Believers be Publicly Declared at the Great Day?

A letter to a friend, on the question, whether the sins of believers shall be publicly declared at the great day? Or, how are we to understand the apostle's assertion, "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one shall receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad?" 2Co. 5:10. compared with Rom. 14:12.

My dear Sir,

My heart congratulates you. What changes and events many in younger life may be reserved to see, who can tell? but your pilgrimage is nearly finished. You stand upon the river's brink, with the city full in view, waiting and wishing for the appointed hour: you need not be anxious concerning your passage; for every circumstance attending it is already adjusted by Infinite Wisdom and Love, and the King himself will be ready to receive you. While you continue here, I am glad to hear from you, and would be glad to contribute in any way or degree to your satisfaction, or even to show my willingness, if I can do no more. I can propose little more than the latter, by offering my thoughts on the subject you propose from 2Co. 5:10, and the apparent difficulty of understanding that passage in full harmony with the many texts which seem expressly to assert, that the sins of believers are so forgiven as to be remembered no more.

There is doubtless (as you observe) a perfect consistence in every part of the word of God: *the difficulties we meet with are wholly owing to the narrowness of our faculties, and the ignorance which in some degree is inseparable from our present state of*

imperfection. And we may, in general, rest satisfied with the thought that there is a bright moment approaching, when the veil shall be wholly taken away. **It is the part of faith to rest upon the plain declarations of Scripture, without indulging a blamable curiosity of knowing more than is clearly revealed;** yet while we humbly depend upon Divine teaching, it is right to aim at as enlarged a sense of what is revealed as we can attain to. Every acquisition of this kind is more valuable than gold, especially respecting those points which have an immediate tendency to comfort and support us under the view of an approaching dissolution: the question you have proposed is undoubtedly of this nature.

May the Lord direct my thoughts and pen that I may not "darken counsel by words without knowledge!" I have been looking over the passage you refer to in Dr. Ridgley, and think I might be well excused from saying anything further on the subject, as he has briefly and fully stated all the arguments that have occurred to me on either side of the question, and closes with a proper caution not to be peremptory in determining, lest by attempting to be wise above what is written, I should betray my own folly. Yet as you desire to have my thoughts, I must say something. I wish I may not give you reason to think that this caution has been lost upon me.

I think all the great truths in which we are concerned, are clearly and expressly laid down, not only in one, but in many places of Scripture; but it sometimes happens, that here and there we meet with a text, which, in the first and obvious sound of the words, seems to speak differently from what is asserted more largely elsewhere; which texts, singly taken, afford some men their only ground for the hypothesis they maintain. Thus the Arians lay a great stress on Joh. 14:28, and the Arminians on Jam. 2:24, &c. But their true interpretation is to be

sought according to the analogy of faith. They are capable of a sense agreeable to the others, though the others are not intelligible in the sense they would fix upon these. In like manner I would say, whatever may be the precise meaning of 2Co. 5:10, we are sure it cannot be designed to weaken what we are taught, in almost every page, of the free, absolute, and unalterable nature of a believer's justification; the benefit of which, as to the forgiveness of sin, is signified by the phrases of "blotting out," "not remembering," "casting behind the back," and "into the depths of the sea." The sins of a believer are so effectually removed, that, even when they are sought for, they cannot be found. For Jesus has borne them away: believers are complete in him, and clothed in his righteousness. They shall stand before God without spot or wrinkle. Who shall lay anything to their charge?

But it is probable that these expressions, chiefly, if not entirely, respect the guilt, imputation, and deserved consequences of sin. None can suppose that the Lord will or can forget the sins of his people, or that they can be ever hidden from his all-comprehending view. Neither can I think they themselves will forget them. Their song is founded upon a recollection of their sins and their circumstances in this life, Rev. 5:9; and their love, and consequently their happiness, seems inseparably connected with the consciousness of what they were, and what they had done. Luk. 7:47. And I think those are the sweetest moments in this life, when we have the clearest sense of our own sins, provided the sense of our acceptance in the Beloved is proportionally clear, and we feel the consolations of his love, notwithstanding all our transgressions. When we arrive in glory, unbelief and fear will cease forever: our nearness to God, and communion with him, will be unspeakably beyond what we can now conceive. Therefore the remembrance of our sins will be no abatement of our bliss, but rather the contrary. When Pharaoh and

his army were alive, and pursuing them, the Israelites were terrified: but afterwards, when they saw their enemies dead upon the shore, their joy and triumph were not abated, but heightened by the consideration of their number.

With respect to our sins being made known to others, I acknowledge with you, that I could not now bear to have any of my fellow-creatures made acquainted with what passes in my heart for a single day; but I apprehend it is a part and a proof of my present depravity, that I feel myself disposed to pay so great a regard to the judgment of men, while I am so little affected with what I am in the sight of the pure and holy God. But I believe that *hereafter, when self shall be entirely rooted out, and my will perfectly united to the Divine will, I would feel no reluctance, supposing it for the manifestation of his glorious grace—that men, angels, and devils, should know the very worst of me.* Whether it will be so or no, I dare not determine.

Perhaps the difficulty chiefly lies in the necessity of our being at present taught heavenly things, by earthly things. In the descriptions we have of the great day, allusion is made to what is most solemn in human transactions. The ideas of the judgment-seat, the great trumpet, of the books being opened, and the pleadings, Mat. 25:37-44, seem to be borrowed from the customs of men, to help our weak conceptions, rather than justly and fully to describe what will be the real process. Now, when we attempt to look into the unseen world, we carry our ideas of time and place, and sensible objects, along with us; and we cannot divest ourselves of them, or provide ourselves with better: yet perhaps they have as little relation to the objects we aim at, as the ideas which a man born blind acquires from what he hears and feels have to the true nature of light and colors. Mr. Locke mentions one, who, after much thought and conversation, supposed he had got a tolerable notion of scarlet, and that it was something

nearly resembling the sound of a trumpet. Perhaps this is no improper emblem of the utmost we call attain to, when we are endeavoring to realize the solemnities of the judgment-day. What we mean by memory and reasoning, may possibly have no place in the world of spirits. We guess at something more suitable, perhaps, when we use the term intuition. But I apprehend we must die before we can fully understand what it signifies: *perhaps thoughts may be as intelligible there, as words are here.*

In a word, my dear sir, if I have not given you satisfaction (I am sure I have not satisfied myself), accept my apology in the words of a much wiser, and an inspired man: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it." Before long we shall know: in the mean while our cause is in sure hands; we have a Shepherd who will guide us below, an Advocate who will receive and present us before the Throne above. I trust we meet daily before the Throne of Grace: hereafter we shall meet in glory.

Family Worship

Sir,

A neglect of family prayer is, I am afraid, too common among professors in this day. I am glad that you consider it both as a duty and a privilege, and are by grace determined, that, when you shall commence as the head of a family, you will worship God with all your house. It was Abraham's commendation, that he not only served the Lord himself, but was solicitous that his children and household might serve him likewise. I trust that he who inclines your heart to walk in the footsteps of faithful Abraham, will bless you in the attempt, and give you peace in your dwelling; a mercy which is

seldom enjoyed, which indeed can hardly be expected, by those families which call not upon the Lord.

Though I readily comply with your request, and would be glad if I can offer anything that may assist or animate you in your good purpose, I am afraid I shall not answer your expectations with regard to the particulars of your inquiry, concerning **the most proper method of conducting family worship**. The circumstances of families are so various, that no determinate rules can be laid down: nor has the word of God prescribed any; because, being of universal obligation, it is wisely and graciously accommodated to suit the different situations of his people. You must, therefore, as to circumstantials, judge for yourself. *You will do well to pursue such a method as you shall find most convenient to yourself and family, without scrupulously binding yourself, when the Scripture has left you free.*

We have no positive precept enjoining us any set time for prayer, nor even how often we should pray, either in public or private; though the expressions of "continuing instant in prayer," "praying without ceasing," and the like, plainly intimate that prayer should be frequent. Daniel prayed three times a day; which the Psalmist speaks of as his practice likewise; and in one place declares his purpose of praising God seven times a day. This last expression is perhaps indefinite, not precisely seven times—but very often. Indeed, *a person who lives in the exercise of faith and love, and who finds by experience that it is good for him to draw near to God, will not need to be told how often he must pray, any more than how often he must converse with an earthly friend. Those whom we love, we love to be much with. Love is the best casuist, and either resolves or prevents a thousand scruples and questions, which may perplex those who only serve God from principles of constraint and fear.* A believer

will account those his happiest days, when he has most leisure and most liberty of spirit for the exercise of prayer.

However, I think family should be performed at least daily, and, when unavoidable hindrances do not prevent, twice a day. Though all times and seasons are alike to the Lord, and his ear is always open whenever we have a heart to call upon him; yet to *us* there is a peculiar suitableness in beginning and closing the day with prayer: in the morning, to acknowledge his goodness in our preservation through the night, and entreat his presence and blessing on our families and callings in the course of the day; and at night, to praise him for the mercies of the day past, to humble ourselves before him for what has been amiss, to wait on him for a renewed manifestation of his pardoning love, and to commit ourselves and our concerns to his care and protection while we sleep.

You will, of course, choose those hours when you are least liable to be interrupted by the calls of business, and when the family can assemble with the most convenience: only I would observe, that it greatly preserves regularity and good order in a house, to keep constantly to the same hours when it is practical; and likewise, that it is best not to defer evening prayer until late, if it can be well avoided; lest some who join in the exercise, and perhaps the person himself who leads in it, should be too weary or sleepy to give a due attention. On this account, I would advise to have family prayer before supper, where people have the choice and disposal of their own hours.

I think, with you, that it is very expedient and proper that reading a portion of the word of God should be ordinarily a part of our family worship; so likewise to sing a hymn or psalm, or part of one, at discretion; provided there are some people in the family who have enough of a musical ear and voice to conduct the singing in a

tolerable manner: otherwise, perhaps, it may be better omitted. If you read and sing, as well as pray, *care should be taken that the combined services do not run into an inconvenient length.*

The chief thing to be attended to is, that it may be a **spiritual** service; and the great evil to be dreaded and guarded against in the exercise of every duty that returns frequently upon us, is **formality**. If a stated course of family prayer is kept up as constantly in its season as the striking of the clock, in time it may come to be almost as mechanically performed, unless we are continually looking to the Lord to keep our hearts alive.

It most frequently happens, that one or more members of a family are unconverted people. When there are such present, a great regard should be had to them, and everything conducted with a view to their edification, that they may not be disgusted or wearied, or tempted to think that it is little more than the fashion or custom of the house; which will probably be the case, unless the master of the family is *lively and earnest in performance of the duty, and likewise circumspect and consistent in every part of his behavior at other times*. By leading in the worship of God before children or strangers, a man gives bond (as it were) for his behavior, and adds strength to every other motive which should engage him to abstain from all appearance of evil. *It should be a constant check upon our language and tempers in the presence of our families, to consider that we began the day, and propose to end it, with them in prayer.* The Apostle Peter uses this argument to influence the conduct of husbands and wives towards each other; and it is equally applicable to all the members of a family; "That your prayers be not hindered," that is, either prevented and put off, or despoiled of all life and efficacy, by the ferment of sinful passions.

On the other hand, the proper exercise of family prayer, when recommended by a suitable deportment, is a happy means of instructing children in the great truths of religion, of softening their prejudices, and inspiring them with a temper of respect and affection, which will dispose them to cheerful obedience, and make them unwilling to grieve or offend.

In this instance, as in every other, we may observe, that the Lord's commands to his people are not arbitrary appointments; but that, so far as they are conscientiously complied with, they have an evident tendency and suitableness to promote our own advantage. He requires us to acknowledge him in our families, for our own sakes; not because he has need of our poor services, but because we have need of his blessing, and without the influence of his grace (which is promised to all who seek it) are sure to be unhappy in ourselves and in all our connections.

When **husband and wife** are happily partakers of the same faith, it seems expedient, and for their mutual good, that, besides their private devotions, and joining in family prayer, they should pray together. They have many needs, mercies, and concerns, in common with each other, and distinct from the rest of the family. The manner in which they should improve a little time in this joint exercise cannot well be prescribed by a third person: yet I will venture to suggest one thing; and especially, as I do not remember to have met with it in print. I conceive that it may prove much to their comfort to pray alternately, not only the husband with and for the wife, but the wife with and for the husband. The Spirit of God, by the Apostle, has expressly restrained women from the exercise of spiritual gifts in public; but I apprehend the practice I am speaking of can no way interfere with that restriction. I suppose them in private together, and then I judge it to be equally right and proper for either of them

to pray with the other. Nor do I meet anything in Paul's writings to prevent my thinking, that if he had been a married man, he would, though an Apostle, have been glad for the prayers of his wife. If you ask, how often they should pray together? I think the oftener the better, provided it does not break in upon their duties; once a day at least; and if there is a choice of hours, it might be as well at some distance from their other seasons of worship. But I would observe, as before, that *in matters not expressly commanded, prudence and experience must direct.*

I have written upon a supposition that you use extemporaneous prayer; but as there are many heads of families who fear the Lord, and have not yet attained liberty to pray extemporaneously before others, I would add, that their inability in this respect, whether real, or whether only proceeding from fear, and an undue regard to self, will not justify them in the omission of family prayer. Helps may be procured. Mr. Jenks's Devotions are in many hands; and I doubt not but there are other excellent books of the same kind, with which I am not acquainted. If they begin with a form, not with a design to confine themselves always to one, but make it a part of their secret pleading at the Throne of Grace, that they may be favored with the gift and spirit of prayer; and accustom themselves, while they use a form, to intersperse some petitions of their own; there is little doubt but they will in time find a growth in liberty and ability, and at length lay their book entirely aside. For it being every believer's duty to worship God in his family, his promise may be depended upon, to give them a sufficiency in all things, for those services which he requires of them.

Happy is that family where the worship of God is constantly and conscientiously maintained. Such houses are temples in which the Lord dwells, and castles garrisoned by a Divine power. I do not say,

that, by honoring God in your house, you will wholly escape a share in the trials incident to the present uncertain state of things. **A measure of such trials will be necessary for the exercise and manifestation of your graces; to give you a more convincing proof of the truth and sweetness of the promises made to a time of affliction; to mortify the body of sin; and to wean you more effectually from the world.** But this I will confidently say, that the Lord will both honor and comfort those who thus honor him. Seasons will occur in which you shall know, and probably your neighbors shall be constrained to take notice, that he has not bid you seek him in vain. If you meet with troubles, they shall be accompanied by supports, and followed by deliverance; and you shall upon many occasions experience, that God is your protector, preserving you and yours from the evils by which you will see others suffering around you.

I have rather exceeded the limits I proposed; and therefore shall only add a request, that in your addresses at the Throne of Grace you will remember me.

The Snares and Difficulties Attending the Ministry of the Gospel

Dear Sir,

I am glad to hear that the Lord is about to fix you in a place where there is a prospect of your being greatly useful. He has given you the desire of your heart; and I hope he has given you likewise *a heart to devote yourself, without reserve, to his service, and the service of souls for his sake.* I willingly comply with your request; and shall

without ceremony, offer you such thoughts as occur to me upon this occasion.

You have, doubtless, often anticipated in your mind the nature of the service to which you are now called, and made it the subject of much consideration and prayer. But a *distant* view of the ministry is generally very different from what it is found to be, when we are actually engaged in it. The young soldier, who has never seen an enemy, may form some general notions of what is before him: but his ideas will be much more lively and different when he comes upon the enemy in the field of battle.

If the Lord was to show us the whole of the work beforehand, who that has a due sense of his own insufficiency and weakness, would venture to engage? But he first draws us by a constraining sense of his love, and by giving us an impression of the worth of souls, and leaves us to acquire a knowledge of what is difficult and disagreeable by a gradual experience. The ministry of the Gospel, like the book which the Apostle John ate, is a *bitter sweet*; but the sweetness is tasted first, the bitterness is usually known afterwards, when we are so far engaged that there is no going back.

Yet I would not discourage you: it is a good and noble cause, and we serve a good and gracious Master; who, though he will make us feel our weakness and vileness, will not allow us to sink under it. His grace is sufficient for us: and if he favors us with a humble and dependent spirit, a single eye, and a simple heart; he will make every difficulty give way, and mountains shall sink into plains before his power.

You have known something of Satan's devices while you were in private life; how he has envied your privileges, assaulted your peace, and laid snares for your feet: though the Lord would not allow him to

destroy you, he has permitted him to sift, and tempt, and shoot his fiery arrows at you. Without some of this discipline, you would have been very unfit for that part of your office which consists in speaking a word in season to weary and heavy laden souls. But you may now expect to hear from him, and to be beset by his power and subtlety in a different manner. You are now to be placed in the forefront of the battle, and to stand as it were as his main target. So far as he can prevail against you now, not yourself only, but many others will be affected. Many eyes will be upon you; and if you take a wrong step, or are ensnared into a wrong spirit, you will open the mouths of the adversaries wider, and grieve the hearts of believers more sensibly, than if the same things had happened to you while you were a layman. The work of the ministry is truly *honorable*; but, like the post of honor in a battle, it is attended with peculiar *dangers*: therefore the Apostle cautions Timothy, "Take heed to yourself, and to your doctrine." To yourself in the first place, and then to your doctrine; the latter without the former would be impracticable and vain.

You have need to be upon your guard in whatever way your first attempts to preach the Gospel may seem to operate. If you should (as may probably be the case, where the truth has been little known) meet with much opposition, you will perhaps find it a heavier trial than you have anticipated; but I speak of it only as it might draw forth your corruption's, and give Satan advantage against you: and this may be two ways; first, by embittering your spirit against opposers, so as to speak in anger, to attack them in defiance, or retaliate upon them in their own way; which, besides bringing guilt upon your conscience, would of course increase your difficulties, and impede your usefulness. A violent opposition against ministers and professors of the Gospel is sometimes expressed by the devil's roaring, and some people think no good can be done without it. It is

allowed, that men who love darkness will show their dislike of the light; but, I believe, if the wisdom and meekness of the friends of the Gospel had been always equal to their good intentions and zeal, the devil would not have had opportunity of roaring so loud as he has sometimes done.

*The subject-matter of the Gospel is offense enough to the carnal heart; we must therefore expect opposition: but we should not provoke or despise it, or do anything to aggravate it. A patient continuance in well-doing, a consistency in character, and an attention to return kind treatment for hard treatment, will, in a course of time, greatly soften the spirit of opposition; and instances are to be found of ministers, who are treated with some respect even by those people who are most averse to their doctrine. When the Apostle directs us, "If it be possible, and as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men," he seems to intimate, that, though it be difficult, it is not wholly impracticable. *We cannot change the rooted prejudices of their hearts against the Gospel;* but it is possible, by the Lord's blessing, to stop their mouths, when they behold our holy lives in Christ. And it is well worth our while to cultivate this outward peace, provided we do not purchase it at the expense of truth and faithfulness; for ordinarily **we cannot hope to be useful to our people, unless we give them reason to believe that we love them, and have their interest at heart.***

Again; opposition will hurt you, if it should give you an idea of your own importance, and lead you to dwell with a secret self-approbation upon your own faithfulness and courage in such circumstances. If you are able to stand your ground, uninfluenced either by the favor or the fear of men, you have reason to give glory to God; but remember, that you cannot thus stand an hour, *unless he upholds you.* It shows a wrong turn of mind, when we are very ready to speak

of *our* trials and difficulties of this kind, and of *our* address and resolution in encountering them. A natural stiffness of spirit, with a desire to have *self* taken notice of, may make a man willing to endure those kind of hardships, though he has but little grace in exercise. But *true Christian fortitude, from a consciousness that we speak the truths of God, and are supported by his power*, is a very different thing.

If you should meet with but little opposition, or if the Lord should be pleased to make your enemies your friends, you will probably be in danger from the opposite quarter. If *opposition* has hurt many, *popularity* has wounded more. To say the truth, I am in some concern for you. Your natural abilities are considerable; you have been diligent in your studies; your zeal is warm, and your spirit is lively. With these advantages, I expect to see you a popular preacher. The more you are so, the greater will your field of usefulness be. But, alas! you cannot yet know what dangers popularity will expose you. It is like walking upon ice. When you shall see an attentive congregation hanging upon your words: when you shall hear the well-meant, but often injudicious commendations, of those to whom the Lord shall make you useful: when you shall find, upon a notice of your preaching in a different place, people thronging from all parts to hear you—how will your heart feel?

It is easy for me to advise you to be humble, and for you to acknowledge the propriety of the advice; but, while human nature remains in its present state, there will be almost the same connection between *popularity* and *pride*—as between fire and gunpowder: they cannot meet without an explosion, at least not unless the gunpowder is kept very damp. So, unless the Lord is constantly moistening our hearts (if I may so speak) by the influences of his Spirit, popularity will soon set us in a blaze! You will hardly find a person, who has

been exposed to this fiery trial, without suffering loss. Those whom the Lord loves, he is able to keep, and he will keep them upon the whole; yet by such means, and in a course of such narrow escapes, that they shall have reason to look upon their deliverance as no less than miraculous.

Sometimes, if his ministers are not watchful against the first impressions of pride, he permits it to gather strength; and then it is but a small thing that a few of their admirers may think them more than men in the pulpit, if they are left to commit such mistakes, when out of it, as the weakest of the flock can discover and pity. And this will certainly be the case, while pride and self-sufficiency have the ascendant. Beware, my friend, of mistaking the *exercise of gifts* for the *exercise of grace*. The minister may be assisted in public for the sake of his hearers; and there is something in the nature of our public work, when surrounded by a concourse of people, which is suited to draw forth the exertion of our abilities, and to engage our attention in the outward services—*when the frame of the heart may be far from being right in the sight of the Lord*.

When Moses smote the rock, the water followed; yet he spoke unadvisedly with his lips, and greatly displeased the Lord. However, the congregation was not disappointed for his fault, nor was he put to shame before them; but he was humbled for it afterwards. They are blessed, whom the Lord preserves in some degree humble, without leaving them to expose themselves to the observation of men, and to receive such wounds as are seldom healed without leaving a deep scar. But even these have much to suffer.

Many distressing exercises you will probably meet with upon the best supposition, to preserve in you a due sense of your own unworthiness, and to convince you, that your ability, your

acceptance, and your usefulness, depend upon a Power beyond your own. Sometimes, perhaps, you will feel such an amazing difference between the frame of your spirit in public, and in private when the eyes of men are not upon you, as will make you almost ready to conclude, that you are no better than an hypocrite, a mere stage-player, who derives all his pathos and exertion from the sight of the audience! At other times, you will find such a total emptiness and indisposition of mind, that former seasons of liberty in preaching will appear to you like the remembrance of a dream, and you will hardly be able to persuade yourself you shall ever be capable of preaching again: the Scriptures will appear to you like a sealed book, and no text or subject afford any light or opening to determine your choice: and this perplexity may not only seize you in the study, but accompany you in the pulpit!

If you are enabled, at some times, to speak to the people with power, and to resemble Samson, when, in the greatness of his strength, he bore away the gates of the city; you will perhaps, at other times, appear before them like Samson when his locks were shorn, and he stood in fetters. So that you need not tell the people you have no sufficiency in yourself; for they will readily perceive it without your telling them. These things are hard to bear; yet successful popularity is not to be preserved upon easier terms: and if they are but sanctified to mortify your pride, you will have reason to number them among your choicest mercies.

I have but just made a beginning upon the subject of the *difficulties* and *dangers* attending the ministry. But my paper is full. If you are willing I should proceed, let me know, and I believe I can easily find enough to fill another sheet. May the Lord make you wise and watchful! That he may be the light of your eye, the strength of your arm, and the joy of your heart, is my sincere prayer.

The Propriety of a Ministerial Address to the Unconverted

Sir,

In a late conversation, you desired my thoughts concerning a scriptural and consistent manner of addressing the consciences of unawakened sinners in the course of your ministry. It is a point on which many eminent ministers have been, and are, not a little divided; and it therefore becomes me to propose my sentiments with modesty and caution, so far as I am constrained to differ from any from whom in general I would be glad to learn.

Some think, that it is sufficient to preach the great truths of the word of God in their hearing; to set forth the utterly ruined and helpless state of fallen man by nature, and the appointed method of salvation by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and then to leave the application entirely to the agency of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten the dark understandings of sinners, and enable them to receive, in a due manner, the doctrines either of the Law or the Gospel. And they apprehend, that all exhortations, arguments, and motives, addressed to those who are supposed to be still under the influence of the carnal mind, are inconsistent with the principles of free grace, and the acknowledged inability of such people to perform any spiritual acts; and that, therefore, the preachers, who, avowing the doctrines of free grace, do notwithstanding plead and expostulate with sinners, usually contradict themselves, and retract in their

application, what they had labored to establish in the course of their sermons.

There are others, who, though they would be extremely unwilling to derogate from the free grace and sovereign power of God in the great work of conversion, or in the least degree to encourage the mistaken notion which every unconverted person has of his own power; yet think it their duty to deal with sinners as rational and moral agents: and as such, besides declaring the counsel of God in a doctrinal way, to warn them by the terrors of the Lord, and to beseech them by his tender mercies, that they receive not the grace of God, in a preached Gospel, in vain. Nor can it be denied, but that some of them, when deeply, affected with the worth of souls, and the solemn importance of eternal things, have sometimes, in the warmth of their hearts, dropped unguarded expressions, and such as have been justly liable to censure.

If we were to decide to which of these different methods of preaching the preference is due, by the discernible effects of each, it will perhaps appear in fact, without making any invidious comparisons, that those ministers whom the Lord has honored with the greatest success in awakening and converting sinners, have generally been led to adopt the more popular way of exhortation and address; while they who have been studiously careful to avoid any direct application to sinners, as unnecessary and improper, if they have not been altogether without seals to their ministry, yet their labors have been more owned in building up those who have already received the knowledge of the truth, than in adding to their number.

Now, as "he who wins souls is wise," and as every faithful laborer has a warm desire of being instrumental in raising the dead in sin to a life of righteousness, this seems at least a presumptive argument in

favor of those, who, besides stating the doctrines of the Gospel, endeavor, by earnest persuasions and exhortations, to impress them upon the hearts of their hearers, and entreat and warn them to consider "how they shall escape, if they neglect so great salvation." For it is not easy to conceive, that the Lord should most signally bear testimony in favor of that mode of preaching which is least consistent with the truth, and with itself.

But, not to insist on this, nor to rest the cause on the authority or examples of men, the best of whom are imperfect and fallible, let us consult the Scriptures, which, as they furnish us with the whole subject-matter of our ministry, so they afford us perfect precepts and patterns for its due and orderly dispensation. With respect to the subject of our inquiry, the examples of our Lord Christ, and of his authorized ministers, the Apostles, are both our rule and our warrant. The Lord Jesus was the great preacher of free grace, "who spoke as never any man spoke;" and his ministry, while it provided relief for the weary and heavy laden, was eminently designed to stain the pride of all human glory. He knew what was in man, and declared, that "none could come unto him, unless drawn and taught of God;" John 6:44-46. And yet he often speaks to sinners in terms which, if they were not known to be his, might perhaps be censured as inconsistent and legal; John 6:27; Luke 13:24-27; John 12:35. It appears, both from the context and the tenor of these passages, that they were immediately spoken, not to his disciples, but to the *multitude*.

The Apostles copied from their Lord: they taught that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, even to think a good thought; and that "it is not of him who wills, or of him who runs, but of God, who shows mercy," yet they plainly called upon sinners (and that before they had given evident signs that they were pricked to the heart, as Act.

2:37), "to repent, and to turn from their vanities to the living God;" Act. 3:19, and Acts 14:15, and Acts 17:30. Peter's advice to Simon Magus is very full and express to this point; for though he perceived him to be "in the very gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity," he exhorted him "to repent, and to pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven." It may be presumed, that we cannot have stronger evidence that any of our hearers are in a carnal and unconverted state, than Peter had in the case of Simon Magus; and therefore there seems no sufficient reason why we should hesitate to follow the Apostle's example.

You have been told, that repentance and faith are spiritual acts, for the performance of which a principle of spiritual life is absolutely necessary; and that, therefore, to exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or believe, must be as vain and fruitless as to call a dead person out of his grave. To this it may be answered, that we might cheerfully and confidently undertake even to call the dead out of their graves—if we had the command and promise of God to warrant the attempt; for then we might expect his power would accompany our word.

The vision of Ezekiel, chapter thirty seven, may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a Gospel minister. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord's question to the Prophet, "Can these dry bones live?" Our resource, like that of the Prophet, is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord: "O Lord, you know: impossible as it is to us, it is easy for you to raise them unto life: therefore we renounce our own reasoning; and though we see that they are dead, we call upon them at your bidding, as if they were alive, and say, *O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!* The means is our part, the power is yours, and to you be all the

praise." The dry bones could not hear the Prophet; but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived; but the word was spoken to them, considered as dry and dead.

It is true, the Lord can, and I hope he often does, make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly to them, only the truths of the Gospel are declared in their hearing. But he, who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners—so far at least as to leave themselves condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which he often effects the purposes of his grace; though none of the means of grace by which he ordinarily works, can produce a real change in the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of his Spirit. Should we admit, that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would perhaps extend too far, even to prove the impropriety of all exhortation universally: for when we invite the weary and heavy laden to come to Jesus, that they may find rest; when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, to "repent, and to do their first works;" yes, when we exhort believers to "walk worthy of God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory:" in each of these cases, *we press them to acts for which they have no inherent power of their own; and, unless the Lord the Spirit is pleased to apply the word to their hearts, we do but speak into the air;* and our endeavors can have no more effect in these instances, than if we were to say to a dead body, "Arise, and walk!" For an exertion of Divine power is no less necessary to the *healing of a wounded conscience*, than to the *breaking of a hard heart*; and only he who has *begun* the good work of grace, is able either to *revive* or to *maintain* it.

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways: they know they are mortal; and the bulk of them are persuaded in their consciences, that after death there is an appointed judgment. They are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins; that they do so, is not for lack of power, but for lack of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths, while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning to night. And many would be deterred from sins to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes.

They have a power likewise of attending upon the means of grace; and though the Lord alone can give them true faith and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the Gospel promises, to seek to him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do that for them, which they cannot do for themselves; and who has said, "Him who comes unto me, I will in never cast out." Perhaps it will not be easily proved, that entreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are in the main agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner's salvation, from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should undoubtedly endeavor to maintain a consistency in our preaching; but unless we keep the plan and manner of the Scripture constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of *consistency* may fetter our sentiments, and greatly preclude our

usefulness. *We need not wish to be more consistent than the inspired writers*, nor be afraid of speaking as they have spoken before us. We may easily perplex ourselves and our hearers, by acute reasoning on the nature of human liberty, and the Divine agency on the hearts of men; but such disquisition's are better avoided. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects, until we arrive in the world of light. In the mean time, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plainly before us.

If, when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favors you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge, and fills your heart with his constraining love, many little curious distinctions, which amused you at other times, will be forgotten. Your soul will go forth with your words; and while your affections yearn over poor sinners, you will not hesitate a moment, whether you ought to warn them of their danger or not. That great champion of free grace, Dr. Owen, has a very solemn address to sinners; the running title to which is, "Exhortations unto believing." It is in his Exposition of the 130th Psalm, from p. 242 to p. 247, which I recommend to your attentive consideration.

The Inward Witness to the Ground and Reality of Faith

Sir,

I readily offer you my thoughts on 1Jo. 26 5:10; "He who believes on the Son of God, has the witness in himself;" though, perhaps, you will think I am writing a sermon, rather than a letter. If we believe in the Son of God, **whatever trials we may meet with in the**

present life, our best concerns are safe, and our happiness is sure. If we do not, whatever else we have, or seem to have, we are in a state of condemnation; and, living and dying so, must perish. Thousands, it is to be feared, persuade themselves that they are believers, though they cannot stand the test of Scripture. And there are many real believers, who, through the prevalence of remaining unbelief, and the temptations of Satan, form hard conclusions against themselves, though the Scripture speaks peace to them. But how does this correspond with the passage before us, which asserts universally, "He who believes has the witness in himself?" for can a man have the witness in himself, and yet not know it? It may be answered, the evidence, in its own nature, is sufficient and infallible; but we are very apt, when we would form a judgment of ourselves, to add additional rules and marks of trial, which are not given us (for that purpose) in the Bible. That the word and Spirit of God do witness for his children, is a point in which many are agreed, who are far from being agreed as to the nature and manner of that witness. It is, therefore, very desirable, rightly to understand the evidence by which we are to judge whether we are believers or not.

The importance and truth of the Gospel salvation is witnessed to in heaven, by "the Father, the Word, and the Spirit." It is witnessed to on earth, by "the Spirit, the water, and the blood," 1Jo. 26 5:7-8. The *spirit*, in 1Jo. 26 5:8, (I apprehend) denotes a Divine light in the understanding, communicated by the Spirit of God, enabling the soul to perceive and approve the truth. The *water* seems to intend the powerful influence of this knowledge and light in the work of sanctification. And the *blood*, the application of the blood of Jesus to the conscience, relieving it from guilt and fear, and imparting a "peace which passes all understanding." And he who believes has this united testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood; not by hearsay only, but in himself. According to the measure of his faith

(for faith has various degrees), he has a living proof that the witness is true, by the effects wrought in his own heart.

These things, which God has joined together, are too often attempted to be separated. Attempts of this kind have been a principal source and cause of most of the dangerous errors and mistakes which are to be found among professors of religion. Some say much concerning the Spirit; and lay claim to an inward light, whereby they think they know the things of God. Others lay great stress upon the water; maintaining a regular conversation, abstaining from the defilement's of the world, and aiming at a mastery over their natural desires and tempers. But neither the one nor the other appear to be duly sensible of the value of the blood of atonement, as the sole ground of their acceptance, and the spring of their life and strength. Others, again, are all for the blood; can speak much of Jesus, and his blood and righteousness; though it does not appear that they are truly spiritually enlightened to perceive the beauty and harmony of Gospel truths, or that they pay a due regard to that "holiness without which no man can see the Lord."

But Jesus came, not by water only, or by blood only, but by water and blood; and the Spirit bears witness to both, because the Spirit is truth. The water alone affords but a cold, starched form of godliness, destitute of that enlivening power which is derived from a knowledge of the preciousness of Jesus, as the Lamb who was slain. And if any talk of the blood without the water, they do but turn the grace of God into licentiousness: so, likewise, to pretend to the Spirit, and at the same time to have low thoughts of Jesus, is a delusion and vanity; for the true Spirit testifies and takes of his glory, and presents it to the soul. But the real believer receives the united testimony, and has the witness in himself that he does so.

To have the witness in ourselves, is to have the truths that are declared in the Scripture, revealed in our hearts. This brings an experimental conviction, which may be safely depended on, "that we have received the grace of God in truth." A man born blind may believe that the sun is bright, upon the testimony of another; but, if he should obtain his sight, he would have the witness in himself. Believing springs from a sense and perception of the truths of the Gospel; and whoever has this spiritual perception is a believer. He has the witness in himself. He has received the *Spirit*: his understanding is enlightened, whereby he sees things to be as they are described in the word of God, respecting his own state by sin, and the utter impossibility of his obtaining relief by any other means than those proposed in the Gospel. These things are hidden from us by nature.

He has likewise received the *blood*. The knowledge of sin, and its demerits, if alone, would drive us to despair; but by the same light of the Spirit, Jesus is apprehended as a suitable and all-sufficient Savior. All that is declared concerning his person, offices, love, sufferings, and obedience, is understood and approved. Here the wounded and weary souls find healing and rest. Then the Apostle's language is adopted, "Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

He has likewise received the *water*, considered as the emblem of sanctification. To a believer, all that the Scripture teaches concerning the nature, beauty, and necessity of holiness—as a living principle in the heart—carries conviction and evidence. A deliverance from the *power*, as well as from the *guilt* of sin, appears to be an important and essential part of salvation. He sees his original and his proper happiness, that nothing less than communion with God and conformity to him, is worth his pursuit. And therefore he can say,

"My soul thirsts for you: I delight in the law of God after the inward man." In a word, his judgment and his choice are formed upon a new spiritual taste, derived from the written word, and correspondent with it, as the musical ear is adapted to relish harmony: so that what God has *forbidden*, appears hateful; what he has *commanded*, necessary; what he has *promised*, desirable; and what he has *revealed*, glorious. Whoever has these perceptions, has the witness in himself, that he has been taught of God, and believes in his Son.

If you think this explanation is agreeable to the Scripture, you will be satisfied that the witness spoken of in this passage, is very different from what some people understand it to be. It is not an impulse, or strong persuasion, impressed upon us in a way of which we can give no account, that "we are the children of God," and that our sins are freely forgiven: nor is the powerful application of a particular text of Scripture necessary to produce it: neither is it always connected with a very lively sensible comfort. These things, in some people and instances, may accompany the witness or testimony we are speaking of, but do not properly belong to it: and they may be, and often have been, counterfeited.

But what I have described is inimitable and infallible; it is indubitably, as the magicians confessed of the miracles of Moses—the finger of God; as certainly the effect of his Divine power as the creation of the world. It is true, many who have this witness walk in darkness, and are harassed with many doubts and perplexities concerning their state: but this is not because the witness is not sufficient to give them satisfaction, but because they do not account it so: being misled by the influence of self-will and a legal spirit, they overlook this evidence as too simple, and expect something extraordinary; at least, they think they cannot be right unless they

are led in the same way in which the Lord has been pleased to lead others with whom they may have conversed.

But the Lord the Spirit is sovereign and free in his operations; and though he gives to all who are the subjects of his grace—the same views of sin, of themselves, and of the Savior; yet, with respect to the circumstantial of his work, there is, as in the features of our faces, such an amazing variety, that *perhaps no two people can be found whose experiences have been exactly alike*: but as the Apostle says, That "he who believes," that is, whoever believes (without exception), "has this witness in himself;" it must consequently arise from what is common to them all, and not from what is peculiar to a few.

Before I conclude, I would make two or three observations. In the first place, I think it is plain, that the supposition of a real believer's living in sin, or taking encouragement from the Gospel so to do, is destitute of the least foundation in truth, and can proceed only from an ignorance of the subject. Sin is the burden under which he groans; and he would account nothing short of a deliverance from it worthy the name of salvation. **A principal part of his evidence that he is a believer, arises from that abhorrence of sin which he habitually feels.** It is true, sin still dwells in him; but he loathes and resists it: upon this account he is in a state of continual warfare; if he was not so, he could not have the witness in himself, that he is born of God.

Again: From hence arises a solid evidence, that the Scripture is indeed the word of God, because it so exactly describes what is exemplified in the experience of all who are subjects of a work of grace. While we are in a natural state, it is to us as a sealed book: though we can read it, and perhaps assent to the facts, we can no more understand our own concernments in what we read, than if it

was written in an unknown tongue. But when the mind is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the Scripture addresses us as it were by name, explains every difficulty under which we labored, and proposes an adequate and effectual remedy for the relief of all our needs and fears.

Lastly: It follows, that the hope of a believer is built upon a foundation that cannot be shaken, though it may and will be assaulted. It does not depend upon occasional and changeable frames, upon any that is precarious and questionable, but upon a correspondence and agreement with the written word. Nor does this agreement depend upon a train of labored arguments and deductions, but is self-evident, as light is to the eye, to every person who has a real participation of the grace of God. It is equally suited to all capacities. By this the unlearned are enabled to know their election of God, and "to rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory." And the wisest, if destitute of this perception, though they may be masters of all the external evidences of Christianity, and able to combat the cavils of infidels, can see no real beauty in the truths of the Gospel, nor derive any solid comfort from them.

I have only sent you a few hasty hints: it would be easy to enlarge; but I sat down, not to write a book, but a letter. **May this inward witness preside with power in our hearts, to animate our hopes, and to mortify our corruptions!**

The Doctrines of Election and Final Perseverance

Dear Sir,

Your letter breathes the spirit of a Christian, though you say you are not a Calvinist. I would have still confined myself, in my letters, to the great truths in which we are agreed, if you had not invited me to touch upon the points wherein we differ. If you were insistent in your present sentiments, I would not think it my duty to debate with you: in that case, we might contend as much for victory as for truth. But as you profess yourself an inquirer, and are desirous of forming your judgment agreeably to the word of God, without being influenced by the authority of names and parties, I willingly embrace the occasion you offer me.

You say, that though you are not prejudiced against the doctrines of election and perseverance of the saints, they appear to you attended with such difficulties, that you cannot yet heartily and fully assent to them. May the Lord the Spirit, whose office it is to guide his people into all truth, dictate to my pen, and accompany what I shall write with his blessing. It is not my intention to prove and illustrate these doctrines at large, or to encounter the various objections that have been raised against them. So much has been done in this way already, that I could only repeat what has been said to greater advantage by others. Nor need I refer you to the books which have been professedly written upon this argument. In a letter to a friend, I shall not aim at the exactness of a disputant, but only offer a few unpremeditated hints, in the same manner as if I had the pleasure of personally conversing with you.

Permit me to remind you, in the first place, of that important aphorism, John 3:27, (which seems to speak strongly in favor, of the doctrines in question): "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from Heaven." If you should accede to my opinions upon my persuasion only, you would be little benefited by the exchange. **The**

Lord alone can give us the true, vital, comfortable, and useful knowledge of his own truths. We may become wise in notions, and so far masters of a system, or scheme of doctrine, as to be able to argue, object, and fight, in favor of our own hypothesis, by dint of application, and natural abilities; but we rightly understand what we say, and whereof we affirm, no farther than we have a spiritual perception of it wrought in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not, therefore, by noisy disputation, but by humble waiting upon God in prayer, and a careful perusal of his holy word, that we are to expect a satisfactory, experimental, and efficacious knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. I am persuaded that you are seeking in this way: if so, I am confident you shall not seek in vain. The Lord teaches effectually, though for the most part gradually. The path of the just is compared to the light, which is very faint at the early dawn, but shines more and more to the perfect day.

If you sincerely seek the Lord's direction by prayer, you will of course make use of his appointed means of information, and search the Scriptures. Give me leave to offer you the following advises, while you are reading and comparing spiritual things with spiritual. First, Not to lay too great stress upon a few detached texts, but seek for that sense which is most agreeable to the general strain of the Scripture. The infallible word of God must, doubtless, be consistent with itself: if it does not appear so to us, the obscurity and seeming inconsistency must be charged to the remaining darkness and ignorance of our minds. As many locks, whose wards differ, are opened with equal ease by one master-key; so there is a certain comprehensive view of scriptural truth, which opens hard places, solves objections, and happily reconciles, illustrates, and harmonizes many texts, which to those who have not this master-key, frequently styled *the analogy of faith*, appear little less than contradictory to

each other. When you obtain this key, you will be sure that you have the right sense.

Again: You will do well to consult experience as you go along. For though this is not to be depended upon in the first instance, but must itself be subjected to the rule of the written word, yet it is a good subordinate help. Consider which sense is most agreeable to what passes within you and around you, and which best answers to the dealings of God with yourself, and to what you can observe of his dealings with others.

Farther: When you are led (as I think you will be, if you are not already) to view the Calvinist doctrines in a favorable light, be not afraid of embracing them, because there may be perhaps some objections which, for lack of a full possession of the key I mentioned, you are not able to clear up; but consider if there are not as strong or stronger objections against the other side. We are poor weak creatures; and the clearing up of every difficulty is not what we are immediately called to, but rather to seek that light which may strengthen and feed our souls.

Lastly: Compare the *tendency* of different opinions. This is an excellent rule, if we can fairly apply it. Whatever is from God, has a sure tendency to ascribe glory to him, to exclude boasting from the creature, to promote the love and practice of holiness, and increase our dependence upon his grace and faithfulness. The Calvinists have no reason to be afraid of resting the merits of their cause upon this issue; notwithstanding the unjust misrepresentations which have been often made of their principles, and the ungenerous treatment of those who would charge the miscarriages of a few individuals, as the necessary consequence of embracing those principles.

But I must check myself, or I shall finish my letter before I properly begin my subject. You have objections to the doctrine of **election**. You will however agree with me, that Scripture does speak of it, and that in very strong and express terms, particularly Paul. I have met with some sincere people, as I believe, who have told me, they could not bear to read his 9th chapter to the Romans, but always passed it over: so that their prejudices against election prejudiced them against a part of the Scripture likewise. But why so, unless because the dreaded doctrine is maintained too plainly to be evaded? But you will say, that some writers and preachers attempt to put an easier sense upon the Apostle's words. Let us judge then, as I lately proposed, from experience.

Admitting, what I am sure you will admit, the total depravity of human nature, *how can we account for the conversion of a soul to God, unless we likewise admit an election of grace?* The work must begin somewhere. Either the sinner first seeks the Lord, or the Lord first seeks the sinner. The former is impossible, if by nature we are dead in trespasses and sins; if the god of this world has blinded our eyes, and maintains the possession of our hearts; and if our carnal minds, so far from being disposed to seek God, are enmity against him.

Let me appeal to yourself. I think you know yourself too well to say, that you either sought or loved the Lord first: perhaps you are conscious, that for a season, and so far as in you lay, you even resisted his call; and must have perished, if he had not made you willing in the day of his power, and saved you in defiance of yourself. In your own case, you acknowledge that he began with you; and it must be the case universally with all who are called, if the whole race of mankind are by nature enemies to God. Then, farther, there must be an election, unless all are called. But we are assured that the broad

road, which is thronged with the greatest multitudes, leads to destruction. Were not you and I in this road? Were we any better than those who continue in it still? What has made us differ from our former selves? Grace! What has made us differ from those who are now as we once were? Grace! Then this grace, by the very terms, must be differencing, or distinguishing grace; that is, in other words, electing grace.

And to suppose that God would make this election or choice only at the time of our calling, is not only unscriptural, but contrary to the dictates of reason, and the ideas we have of the Divine perfections, particularly those of omniscience and immutability. Those who believe there is any power in man by nature, whereby he can turn to God, may contend for a conditional election upon the foresight of faith and obedience: but while others dispute, let you and I admire, for we know that the Lord foresaw us (as we were) in a state utterly incapable either of believing or obeying, unless he was pleased to work in us to will and to do according to his own good pleasure.

As to **final perseverance**, whatever judgment we form of it in a doctrinal view, unless we ourselves do so persevere, our profession of religion will be utterly vain; for only "those who endure to the end shall be saved." It would seem that whoever believes this, and is duly apprised of his own weakness, the number and strength of his spiritual enemies, and the difficulties and dangers arising from his situation in this evil world, will at least be desirous to have (if possible) some security that his labor and expectation shall not be in vain. To be at an uncertainty in a point of so great importance; to have nothing to trust to for our continuance in well-doing, but our own feeble efforts, our partial diligence and shortsighted care; must surely be distressing, if we rightly consider how unable we are in

ourselves to withstand the forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil, which are combined against our peace.

In this view I would expect, that the opposers of this doctrine, if thoroughly sensible of their state and situation, upon a supposition, that they should be able to prove it unscriptural and false, would weep over their victory, and be sorry that a sentiment, so apparently suited to encourage and animate our hope, should not be founded in truth. It is not to be wondered at, that this doctrine, which gives to the Lord the glory due to his name, and provides so effectually for the comfort of his people, should be opposed and traduced by men of corrupt hearts. But it may well seem strange, that those who feel their need of it, and cannot be comfortable without it, should be afraid or unwilling to receive it. Yet many a child of light is walking in darkness upon this account. Either they are staggered by the sentiments of those whom they think wiser than themselves, or stumbled by the falls of professors who were once advocates for this doctrine, or perplexed because they cannot rightly understand those passages of Scripture which seem to speak a different language. But, as light and knowledge increase, these difficulties are lessened. The Lord claims the honor; and he engages for the accomplishment of a complete salvation, that no power shall pluck his people out of his hand, or separate them from his love.

Their perseverance in grace, besides being asserted by many express promises, may be proved with the fullest evidence from the unchangeableness of God, the intercession of Christ, the union which exists between him and his people, and from the principle of spiritual life he has implanted in their hearts, which in its own nature is connected with everlasting life; for *grace is the seed of glory*. I have not room to enlarge on these particulars, but refer you to the following texts, from which various strong and invincible arguments

might be drawn for their confirmation: Luke 14:28-30, compared with Phi. 1:6; Heb. 7:25, with Rom. 8:34-39; John 14:19, with John 15:1-2; John 4:14. Upon these grounds, my friend, why may not you, who have fled for refuge to the hope set before you, and committed your soul to Jesus, rejoice in his salvation; and say, "While Christ is the foundation, root, head, and husband of his people, while the word of God is Yes and Amen, while the counsels of God are unchangeable, while we have a Mediator and High Priest before the throne, while the Holy Spirit is willing and able to bear witness to the truths of the Gospel, while God is wiser than men, and stronger than Satan—so long the believer in Jesus is and shall be safe? Heaven and earth must pass away; but the promise, the oath, the blood, on which my soul relies, affords me a security which can never fail."

As the doctrines of election and perseverance are comfortable, so *they cut off all pretense of boasting and self-dependence when they are truly received in the heart, and therefore tend to exalt the Savior*. Of course they stain the pride of all human glory, and leave us nothing to glory in but the Lord. The more we are convinced of our utter depravity and inability from first to last, the more excellent will Jesus appear. The whole may give the physician a good word, but the sick alone know how to prize him. And here I cannot but remark a difference between those who have nothing to trust to but free grace, and those who ascribe a little at least to some good disposition and ability in man. We assent to whatever they enforce from the word of God on the subject of sanctification. We acknowledge its importance, its excellency, its beauty; but we could wish they would join more with us in exalting the Redeemer's name. Their experience seems to lead them to talk of themselves, of the change that is wrought in them, and the much that depends upon their own watchfulness and striving. We likewise would be thankful if we could perceive a change wrought in us by the power of grace; we desire to

be found watching likewise. But when our hopes are most alive, it is less from a view of the imperfect beginnings of grace in our hearts, than from an apprehension of him who is our all in all. His person, his love, his sufferings, his intercession, his compassion, his fullness, and his faithfulness—these are our delightful themes, which leave us little leisure, when in our best frames, to speak of ourselves. How do our hearts soften, and our eyes melt, when we feel some liberty in thinking and speaking of him! For we had no help in time past, nor can have any in time to come, but from him alone.

If any people have contributed a mite to their own salvation, it was more than we could do. If any were obedient and faithful to the first calls and impressions of his Spirit, it was not our case. If any were prepared to receive him beforehand, we know that we were in a state of alienation from him. **We needed sovereign, irresistible grace to save us, or we would be lost forever!** If there are any who have a power of their own, we must confess ourselves poorer than they are. We cannot watch, unless he watches with us; we cannot strive, unless he strives with us; we cannot stand one moment, unless he holds us up; and we believe we must perish after all, unless his faithfulness is engaged to keep us. But this we trust he will do, not for our righteousness, but for his own name's sake, and because, having loved us with an everlasting love, he has been pleased in loving kindness to draw us to himself, and to be found by us when we sought him not.

Can you think, dear Sir, that a person who lives under the influence of these sentiments, will desire to continue in sin because grace abounds? No! you are too candid an observer of men and manners, to believe the calumnies which are propagated against us. It is true, there are too many false and empty professors among us; but are there none among those who hold the opposite sentiments? And I

would observe, that the objection drawn from the miscarriages of reputed Calvinists is quite beside the purpose. We maintain, that no doctrines or means can change the heart, or produce a gracious conversation, without the efficacious power of Almighty grace: therefore, if it is found to be so in fact, it should not be charged against our doctrine, but rather admitted as a proof and confirmation of it. We confess, that we fall sadly short in everything, and have reason to be ashamed and amazed that we are so faintly influenced by such animating principles; yet, upon the whole, our consciences bear us witness, and we hope we may declare it both to the church and to the world without just fear of contradiction, that **the doctrines of grace are doctrines according to godliness.**

Simplicity and Godly Sincerity

"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in **simplicity and godly sincerity**, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world." 2 Corinthians 1:12

Dear Sir,

It would be a happy time if all professors of the Gospel could, with the Apostle, rejoice in the testimony of their consciences, that they lived in simplicity and godly sincerity. How many evils and scandals would be then prevented! But, alas! too many who name the name of Christ, seem to have hardly any idea of this essential part of the Christian character. A few thoughts upon a subject so little attended to, may not be unseasonable. The most advanced in the Christian life have something of this lesson yet to learn; and the greater

proficiency we make in it, the greater will be our inward peace, and the more will our light shine before men, to the glory of our Heavenly Father.

Simplicity and sincerity, though inseparable, may be distinguished. The former is the principle from which the latter is derived. Simplicity primarily respects the frame of our spirit in the sight of God; sincerity more directly regards our conduct as it falls under the observation of men. It is true, the terms are frequently used interchangeably for each other, and may be so without occasioning any considerable mistake; but as they are not precisely the same, it may be proper, if we would speak accurately, to keep this distinction in view.

Some people, who have been more enamored with the name of **simplicity** than acquainted with its nature, have substituted in its stead a childishness of language and manners; as if they understood the word *simple* only in the mere vulgar sense, as equivalent to foolish. But this infantile softness gives just disgust to those who have a true taste and judgment of Divine things. An artificial or pretended simplicity is a contradiction in terms, and differs as much from the simplicity of the Gospel as paint does from beauty.

The true simplicity, which is the honor and strength of a believer, is the effect of a spiritual perception of the truths of the Gospel. It arises from, and bears a proportion to, the sense we have of our own unworthiness, the power and grace of Christ, and the greatness of our obligations to him. So far as our knowledge of these things is vital and experimental, it will make us simple-hearted. This simplicity may be considered in two respects, —a simplicity of intention, and a simplicity of dependence. The former stands in

opposition to the corrupt workings of self, the latter to the false reasoning of unbelief.

Simplicity of intention, implies that we have but one leading aim, to which it is our deliberate and unreserved desire that everything else in which we are concerned may be subordinate and subservient—in a word, that we are devoted to the Lord, and have by grace been enabled to choose him, and to yield ourselves to him, so as to place our happiness in his favor, and to make his glory and will, the ultimate scope of all our actions. He well deserves this from us. He is the all-sufficient good. He alone is able to satisfy the vast capacity he has given us; for he formed us for himself: and those who have tasted he is gracious, know that "his loving-kindness is better than life;" and that his presence and fullness can supply the lack, or make up the loss, of all creature-comforts.

So likewise he has a just claim to us that we should be wholly his: for, besides that, as his creatures, we are in his hand as clay in the hands of the potter, he has a redemption-title to us: He loved us, and bought us with his own blood. He did not hesitate or halt between two opinions, when he engaged to redeem our souls from the curse of the law and the power of Satan. He could, in the hour of his distress, have summoned legions of angels (had that been needful) to his assistance, or have destroyed his enemies with a word or a look; he could easily have saved himself; but how then could his people have been saved, or the promises of the Scripture have been fulfilled? Therefore he willingly endured the cross, he gave his back to the smiters, He poured out his blood, he laid down his life. Here was an adorable simplicity of intention in him!

"And shall we not, O Lover of souls! be simply, heartily, and wholly yours? Shall we refuse the cup of affliction from your hand, or for

your sake? Or shall we desire to drink of the cup of sinful pleasure, when we remember what our sins have cost you? Shall we wish to be loved by the world which hated you, or to be admired by the world which despised you? Shall we be ashamed of professing our attachment to such a Savior? No, Lord, forbid it. Let your love constrain us; let your name be glorified, and your will be done, by us and in us. Let us count all things dross and dirt for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us not desire anything which you see fit to withhold, nor repine to part with what you call for; nor even take pleasure in what you bestow, unless we can improve it for you; and ever prefer your love above our chief temporal joy!"

Such is the language of the heart that is blessed with Gospel simplicity. It was once the strong-hold of sin, the throne of self; but now self is cast down, and Jesus rules by the golden scepter of love. This principle preserves the soul from low, sordid, and idolatrous pursuits; will admit of no rival near the Beloved, nor will it yield either to the bribes or threats of the world.

There is likewise a **simplicity of dependence**. Unbelief is continually raising objections, magnifying and multiplying difficulties. But faith in the power and promises of God inspires a noble simplicity, and casts every care upon him, who is able and has engaged to support and provide.

Thus, when **Abraham**, at the Lord's call, forsook his country and his father's house, the Apostle observes, "he went out, not knowing where he went." It was enough that he knew whom he followed: the all-sufficient God was his guide, his shield, and his exceeding great reward. So, when exercised with long waiting for the accomplishment of a promise, he staggered not—he did not dispute

or question—but simply depended upon God, who had spoken, and was able also to perform. So likewise, when he received that hard command to offer up his son, of whom it was said, "in Isaac shall your seed be called," he simply obeyed, and depended upon the Lord to make good his own word: Heb. 11:18-19.

In this spirit David went forth to meet Goliath, and overcame him. And thus the three worthies were unawed by the threats of Nebuchadnezzar, and rather chose to be cast into a burning furnace than to sin against the Lord. And thus Elijah, in a time of famine, was preserved from concern and need, and supported by extraordinary methods; 1Ki. 31 1:14 In these times we do not expect miracles, in the strict sense of the word; but those who simply depend upon the Lord, will meet with such tokens of his interposition in a time of need, as will, to themselves at least, be a satisfying proof that he cares for them. How comfortable is it to us, as well as ornamental to our profession, to be able to trust the Lord in the path of duty! to believe that he will supply our needs, direct our steps, plead our cause, and control our enemies! Thus he has promised, and it belongs to Gospel simplicity to take his word against all discouragements. This will animate us in the use of all lawful means, because the Lord has commanded us to wait upon him in them: but it will likewise inspire confidence and hope when all means seem to fail, Hab. 3:17, Hab. 3:18.

For lack of this dependence many dishonor their profession, and even make shipwreck of the faith. Their hearts are not simple; they do not trust in the Lord, but lean unto their own understandings, and their hopes or fears are influenced by worms like themselves. This causes a duplicity of conduct. They fear the Lord—and serve other gods. By their language, at some times, one would suppose they desire to serve the Lord only; but, as if they feared that he was not

able to protect or provide for them, they make a league with the world, and seek either security or advantage from sinful compliances. These cannot rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience. They must live miserably. They are attempting to reconcile, what our Lord has declared to be utterly incompatible, the service of God and Mammon. They have so much sense of religion as embitters their worldly pursuits; and so much regard to the world as prevents their receiving any real comfort from religion. These are the lukewarm professors, neither hot nor cold; neither approved of men, nor accepted of God. They can attend upon ordinances, and speak like Christians; but their tempers are unsanctified, and their conduct irregular and blamable. They are not simple; and therefore they cannot be sincere.

I need not take time to prove, that the effect of simplicity will be sincerity. For those who love the Lord above all, who prefer the light of his countenance to thousands of gold and silver, who are enabled to trust him with all their concerns, and would rather be at his disposal than at their own, will have but little temptation to insincerity. The principles and motives upon which their conduct is formed, are the same in public as in private. Their behavior will be all of one piece, because they have but one design. They will speak the truth in love, observe a strict punctuality in their dealings, and do unto others as they would others should do unto them; because these things are essential to their great aim of glorifying and enjoying their Lord. A fear of dishonoring his name, and of grieving his Spirit, will teach them not only to avoid gross and known sins, but to abstain from all appearance of evil. Their conduct will therefore be consistent; and they will be enabled to appeal to all who know them, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have conducted themselves in the world."

To a sincere Christian, that deceit and cunning which passes for wisdom in the world, appears to be not only unlawful but unnecessary. He has no need of the little reserves, evasions, and disguises, by which designing men endeavor (though often in vain) to conceal their proper characters, and to escape deserved contempt. **He is what he seems to be, and therefore is not afraid of being found out.** He walks by the light of the wisdom that is from above, and leans upon the arm of Almighty Power; therefore he walks at liberty—trusting in the Lord, whom he serves with his spirit in the Gospel of his Son.

Love to the Brethren

Dear Sir,

The Apostle having said, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hates you," immediately subjoins, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." By the manner of his expression, he sufficiently intimates, that the lack of this love is so universal, until the Lord plants it in the heart, that if we possess it, we may thereby be sure he has given us of his Spirit, and delivered us from condemnation. But as the heart is deceitful, and people may be awfully mistaken in the judgment they form of themselves, we have need to be very sure that we rightly understand what it is to love the brethren, before we draw the Apostle's conclusion from it, and admit it as an evidence in our own favor, that we have passed from death unto life. Let me invite you, reader, to attend with me a little to this subject.

There are some **COUNTERFEITS** of this love to the brethren, which it is to be feared have often been mistaken for it, and have led

people to think themselves something, when indeed they were nothing. For instance:

1. There is a natural love of the brethren. People may sincerely love their relations, friends, and benefactors, who are of the brethren, and yet be utter strangers to the spiritual love the Apostle speaks of. So Orpah had a great affection for Naomi, though it was not strong enough to make her willing with Ruth to leave her native country, and her idol-gods. Natural affection can go no farther than to a personal attachment; and those who thus love the brethren, and upon no better ground, are often disgusted with those things in them, for which the real brethren chiefly love one another.

2. There is likewise a love of convenience. The Lord's people are gentle, peaceful, benevolent, swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. They are desirous of adorning the doctrine of God their Savior, and approving themselves followers of him who pleased not himself, but spent his life in doing good to others. Upon this account, those who are full of themselves, and love to have their own way, may like their company, because they find more compliances and less opposition from them, than from such as themselves. For a while Laban loved Jacob; he found him diligent and trustworthy, and perceived that the Lord had prospered him upon Jacob's account; but when he saw that Jacob flourished, and apprehended he was likely to do without him, his love was soon at an end; for it was only founded in self-interest.

3. A party-love is also common. The objects of this are those who are of the same sentiment, worship in the same way, or are attached to the same minister. Those who are united in such narrow and separate associations, may express warm affections, without giving any proof of true Christian love; for upon such grounds as

these, not only professed Christians, but Jews and Turks, may be said to love one another: though it must be allowed, that, believers being renewed but in part, the love which they bear to the brethren is too often debased and alloyed by a mixture of selfish affections.

The principle of true love to the brethren, is the love of God—that love which produces obedience: 1Jo. 5:2; "By this we know that we love the children of God, if we love God, and keep his commandments." When people are free to form their connections and friendships, the ground of their communion is in a *sameness of inclination*. Christian love is spiritual. The children of God, who therefore stand in the relation of brethren to each other, though they have too many unhappy differences in points of smaller importance, agree in the supreme love they bear to their heavenly Father, and to Jesus their Savior; of course they agree in disliking and avoiding sin, which is contrary to the will and command of the God whom they love and worship. Upon these accounts they love another, they are like-minded; and they live in a world where the bulk of mankind are against them, have no regard to their Beloved, and live in the sinful practices which his grace has taught them to hate. Their situation, therefore, increases their affection to each other. They are washed by the same blood, supplied by the same grace, opposed by the same enemies, and have the same heaven in view: therefore they love one another with a pure heart fervently.

The properties of this love, where its exercise is not greatly impeded by ignorance and bigotry, are such as prove its heavenly original. It extends to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, cannot be confined within the pale of a denomination, nor restrained to those with whom it is more immediately connected. It is gentle, and not easily provoked; hopes the best, makes allowances for infirmities, and is easily entreated. It is kind and compassionate; and this not in

words only, but sympathizes with the afflicted, and relieves the indigent, according to its ability; and as it primarily respects the image of Christ in its objects, it feels a more peculiar attachment to those whom it judges to be the most spiritual, though without undervaluing or despising the weakest attainments in the true grace of the Gospel.

They are happy who thus love the brethren They have passed from death unto life; and may plead this gracious disposition, though not before the Lord as the ground of their hope, yet against Satan, when he would tempt them to question their right to the promises.

But, alas! as I before hinted, the exercise of this love, when it really is implanted, is greatly obstructed through the remaining depravity which cleaves to believers. We cannot be too watchful against those tempers which weaken the proper effects of brotherly love, and thereby have a tendency to darken the evidence of our having passed from death unto life.

We live in a day when the love of many (of whom we would hope the best) is at least grown very cold. The effects of a narrow, a suspicious, a censorious, and a selfish spirit, are but too evident among professors of the Gospel. If I were to insist at large upon the offenses of this kind which abound among us, I would seem almost reduced to the necessity, either of retracting what I have advanced, or of maintaining that a great part (if not the greatest part) of those who profess to know the Lord, are deceiving themselves with a form of godliness, destitute of the power: for though they may abound in knowledge and gifts, and have much to say upon the subject of Christian experience, they appear to lack the great, the inimitable, the indispensable criterion of true Christianity, a love to the brethren; without which, all other seeming advantages and

attainments are of no avail. How is this disagreeable dilemma to be avoided?

I believe those who are most under the influence of Divine love, will join with me in lamenting their deficiency. It is well that we are not under the law, but under grace; for on whatever point we try ourselves by the standard of the sanctuary, we shall find reason to say, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord." **There is an amazing and humbling difference between the conviction we have of the beauty and excellence of Divine truths, and our actual experience of their power ruling in our hearts.** In our happiest hours, when we are most affected with the love of Jesus, we feel our love fervent towards his people. We wish it were always so; but **we are poor inconsistent creatures, and find we can do nothing as we ought, but only as we are enabled by his grace.** But we trust we do not allow ourselves in what is wrong; and, notwithstanding we may in particular instances be misled by ignorance and prejudice, we do in our hearts love the brethren, account them the excellent of the earth, and desire to have our lot and portion with them in time and in eternity. We know that the love we bear them is for his sake; and when we consider his interest in them, and our obligations to him, we are ashamed and grieved that we love them no better.

If we could not conscientiously say thus much, we should have just reason to question our sincerity, and the safety of our state; for the Scriptures cannot be broken, nor can the grace of God fail of producing in some degree its proper fruits. Our Savior, before whom we must shortly appear as our judge, has made *love* the characteristic of his disciples; and without some evidence that this is the prevailing disposition of our hearts, we could find little comfort in calling him God. Let not this be accounted legality, as if our

dependence was upon something in ourselves. The question is not concerning the method of acceptance with God, but concerning the **fruits** or **tokens** of an accepted state. The most eminent of these, by our Lord's express declaration, is brotherly love. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

No words can be plainer; and the consequence is equally plain, however hard it may bear upon any professors, that, though they could speak with the tongues of angels, had the knowledge of all mysteries, a power of working miracles, and a zeal prompting them to give their bodies to be burned in defense of the truth; yet if they love not the brethren, they are but as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals: they may make a great noise in the church and in the world; they may be wise and able men, as the words are now frequently understood; they may pray or preach with great fluency; but in the sight of God their faith is dead, and their religion is vain.

Candor

(Definition: Openness of heart; frankness; ingenuousness of mind; a disposition to treat subjects with fairness; freedom from tricks or disguise; sincerity.)

Dear Sir,

I am, with you, an admirer of candor; but let us beware of counterfeits. True candor is a Christian grace, and will grow in none but a believing heart. It is an eminent and amiable property of that love which bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. It forms the most favorable judgment of people and characters, and puts the kindest construction upon the conduct of others that it possibly can,

consistent with the love of truth. It makes due allowances for the infirmities of human nature, will not listen with pleasure to what is said to the disadvantage of any, nor repeat it without a justifiable cause. It will not be confined within the walls of a party, nor restrain the actings of benevolence to those whom it fully approves; but prompts the mind to an imitation of Him who is kind to the unthankful and the evil, and has taught us to consider every person we see as our neighbor.

Such is the candor which I wish to derive from the Gospel; and I am persuaded those who have imbibed most of this spirit, will acknowledge that they are still defective in it. There is an unhappy propensity, even in Christian men, to a selfish, narrow, censorious turn of mind; and the best are more under the power of prejudice than they are aware. A lack of candor among the professors of the same Gospel, is too visible in the present day. A truly candid person will acknowledge what is right and excellent in those from whom he may be obliged to differ: he will not charge the faults or extravagances of a few--upon a whole party or denomination: if he thinks it his duty to point out or refute the errors of any people, he will not impute to them such *consequences* of their tenets as they expressly disavow; he will not willfully misrepresent or aggravate their mistakes, or make them offenders for a word: he will keep in view the distinction between those things which are fundamental and essential to the Christian life, and those concerning which a difference of sentiment may and often has obtained among true believers. Were there more candor among those who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, the emotions of anger or scorn would not be so often felt or excited by pronouncing or hearing the words Churchman, or Dissenter, or Calvinist, or even Arminian.

Let us, my friend, be candid: let us remember how totally ignorant we ourselves once were; how often we have changed our sentiments in one particular or other, since we first engaged in the search of truth; how often we have been imposed upon by appearances; and to how many different people and occurrences we have been indebted, under God, for the knowledge which we have already attained. Let us likewise consider what treatment we like to meet with from others; and do unto them as we would they should do unto us. These considerations will make the exercise of candor habitual and easy.

But there is a candor, falsely so called, which springs from an indifference to the truth, and is governed by the fear of men and the love of praise. This pretended candor depreciates the most important doctrines of the Gospel, and treats them as points of speculation and opinion. It is a temporizing expedient to stand fair with the world, and to avoid that odium which is the unavoidable consequence of a steadfast, open, and hearty adherence to the truth as it is in Jesus. It aims to establish a fellowship between light and darkness, Christ and Belial; and, under a pretense of avoiding harsh and uncharitable judgments, it introduces a mutual connivance in principles and practices which are already expressly condemned by clear decisions of Scripture. Let us not listen to the advocates for a candor of this sort; such a lukewarm temper, in those who would be thought friends of the Gospel, is treason against God, and treachery to the souls of men.

It is observable, that those who boast most of this candor, and pretend to the most enlarged and liberal way of thinking, are generally agreed to exclude from their comprehension all whom they call bigots; that is, in other words, those who, having been led by Divine grace to build their hopes upon the Foundation which God has laid in Zion, are free to declare their conviction, that other

foundation can no man lay; and who, having seen that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, dare no longer conform to its leading maxims or customs, nor express a favorable judgment of the state or conduct of those who do. Those with this false candor, know not how to be candid to those who are truly godly; their singularity and importunity are offensive; and it is thought no way inconsistent with the specious boast of benevolence and moderation to oppose, hate, and revile them. A sufficient proof, that the candor which many plead for is only a softer name for that *intolerant spirit of the world* which opposes itself to the truth and obedience of the Gospel.

If a person be an avowed Socinian or Deist, I am still to treat him with candor; he has a right from me, so far as he comes in my way, to all the kind offices of humanity. I am not to hate, reproach, or affront him; or to detract from what may be valuable in his character, considered as a member of society. I may avail myself of his talents and abilities in points where I am not in danger of being misled by him. He may be a good lawyer, or historian, or physician; and I am not to lessen him in these respects, because I cannot commend him as a divine. I am bound to pity his errors, and to pray if perhaps God will give him repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth; and if I have a call to converse with him, I should speak with all gentleness and meekness, **remembering that grace alone has made me to differ**. But I am not to compliment him, to insinuate, or even to admit, that there can be any safety in his principles. Far be that candor from us, which represents the Scripture as a nose of wax, so that a person may reject or elude the testimonies there given to the Deity and atonement of Christ, and the all-powerful agency of the Holy Spirit, with impunity.

On the other hand, those who hold the Head, who have received the record which God has given of his Son; who have Scriptural views of

sin and grace, and fix their hopes for time and eternity upon the Savior; in a word, all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity—these, I apprehend, if they are prevented from receiving, acknowledging, and loving each other--as he has received, owned, and loved them--are justly chargeable with a lack of candor. Shall I be cold to those whom Jesus loves? Shall I refuse them whom he has accepted? I find perhaps that they cannot rightly understand, and therefore cannot readily embrace, some points of doctrine in which the Lord has been pleased to enlighten me; that is, I (supposing my knowledge to be real and experimental) have received five talents, and they have as yet obtained but two; must I for this estrange myself from them? Rather let me be careful lest they be found more faithful and exemplary in the improvement of two talents, than I am in the management of five.

Again: why should some of those who know, or might know, that my hope, my way, my end, and my enemies, are the same with theirs, stand aloof from me, and treat me with coldness and suspicion, because I am called a Calvinist? I was not born a Calvinist, and possibly they may not die opposed to Calvinism. However that may be, if our hearts are fixed upon the same Jesus, we shall be perfectly of one mind before long; why should we not encourage and strengthen one another now? O that the arm of the Lord might be revealed, to revive that candor which the Apostle so strongly enforces both by precept and example! Then the strong would bear the infirmities of the weak, and believers would receive each other without doubtful disputation.

Once more: However sound and orthodox (as the phrase is) professors may be in their principles, though true candor will make tender allowances for the frailty of nature, and the power of temptation; yet neither candor nor charity will require us to accept

them as real believers, unless the general strain and tenor of their deportment be as becomes the Gospel of Christ. It is to be lamented that too many judge rather by the *notions* which people express, than by the *fruits* which they produce; and as they judge of others, so they often judge of themselves. We cannot have opportunity to say all we could wish, and to all to whom we would wish to say it, upon this subject, in private life. Therefore it is the wisdom and duty of those who preach, and of those who print, to drop a word of caution in the way of their hearers and readers, that they may not mistake *notion* for spiritual life, nor a *form of godliness* for the power.

"When he arrived and saw **the evidence of the grace of God**, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." Acts 11:23 The grace of God is an operative principle; and where it really has place in the heart, the effects will be seen; effects so uniform and extensive, that the Apostle James makes one single branch of conduct, and that such a one as is not usually thought the most important, a sufficient test of our state before God; for he affirms universally, that "if any man seems to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, his religion is vain." And again he assures us, that "whoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." And to the same purpose Paul expresses himself on the subject of love (that love which he describes so accurately, that none can mistake it, unless they willingly deceive themselves): he declares, that, without this love, the brightest knowledge, the warmest zeal, and the most splendid gifts, are nothing worth.

It is to be feared these decisions will bear hard upon many who have a name to live among the churches of Christ. They are hearers and approvers of the Gospel, express a regard to those who preach it; they will stickle and fight for the doctrines, and know not how to bear those who fall a hair's breadth short of their standard; and yet there

is so much levity or pride, censoriousness or worldliness, discoverable in their general behavior, that their characters appear very dubious; and though we are bound to wish them well, candor will not oblige or warrant us to judge favorably of such conduct; for the unerring word of God is the standard to which our judgments are to be referred and conformed.

In the sense, and under the limitations, which I have expressed, we ought to cultivate a candid spirit, and learn, from the experience of our own weakness, to be gentle and tender to others; avoiding at the same time that indifference and cowardice, which, under the name of candor, countenances error, extenuates sin, and derogates from the authority of Scripture.

Christian Experience

Dear Sir,

I trust the difference of our sentiments, since we are agreed in the one thing needful, will no more interrupt our union and fellowship, than the difference of our features, or the tone of our voices. I wish you to believe that I would be no advocate for carelessness or formality. I hope my conscience bears me witness, that, besides trusting in the letter of the Scripture, I likewise desire an increase of that inward and comfortable sense of Divine things in which I believe you are happy; and that I wish not only to be a subject of the kingdom of Jesus, but likewise to have that kingdom powerfully set up in my heart—which consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, I see not how these can be distinguished, or what ground I could have to think myself a subject of his kingdom, unless I earnestly desired to have that kingdom in all its branches and blessings flourishing in my soul. I do not know that I live in the neglect of any means appointed of God for my growth in these blessings, or willingly allow myself in what is inconsistent with them; I think my heart is habitually in the pursuit of them, and that there is seldom an hour in any day when lively communion with my God, in Christ, is not present to my view as the chief good. To this purpose, through grace, I can venture to express myself to man, *though still it is true, when I come before the Lord, notwithstanding the diligence and circumspection I would aim at, I see myself a poor inconsistent creature, that my strength is total weakness, and all I have is sin.*

I confess I am afraid of fixing the criterion of a work of grace too high, lest the mourners in Zion should be discouraged; because I find it is the will of God that such should not be discouraged, but comforted; and because it appears to me, that the Scriptural marks have respect rather to **desires**, if real, than to **attainments**, or at least to those attainments which are often possessed by people who are kept very short of sensible comforts: Mat. 5:3-9; Luke 18:12, Luke 18:13; 1Pe. 2:7.

The points between you and I seem chiefly the following:

1. When may a person be properly denominated a believer?
2. What are the proper evidences and necessary concomitants of a lively thriving frame of spirit?
3. Whether such a degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent with the remnant of a depraved nature in our present

state, will certainly and always preserve our souls from declensions and winter seasons?

4. Whether that gracious humility, which arises from a due sense of our own vileness, and of the riches of Divine grace, be ordinarily attainable without some mortifying experience of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of our own hearts?

A few lines upon each of these particulars, will, I think, take in the chief parts of your letter.

1. We differ something with respect to **what constitutes a believer**. I own nothing has surprised me more, in the course of our friendly debate, than your supposing that a person should date his conversion and his commencing a believer, from the time of his receiving the Gospel truths with that clearness and power as to produce in him an abiding *assurance*. The Apostle, in Eph. 1:13, makes a plain distinction between believing and being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. By the experience and observation of many years, I have been more and more persuaded, that to represent assurance as being of the essence of faith, is not agreeable to the Scripture, which in many places either expressly asserts, or strongly intimates, the contrary: John 1:50, and John 20:29; Rom. 10:9; 1Jo. 5:1. Whoever is not a believer, must be an unbeliever; there can be no medium. Either there are many believers who have not assurance, or else there are many unbelievers who love the Lord Jesus, hate sin, are poor in spirit, and adorn the doctrine of the Gospel by their temper and conversation: and I doubt not but those who now have assurance, had, before they attained it, a something which wrought by love, and overcame the world. I know no principle capable of these effects but true faith, which, though at first it be like a grain of mustard-seed, is the seed of God through it be faint, it is genuine, as

the dawning light is of the same nature with that which flows from the noonday sun. I allow that while faith is weak, there may be little solid comfort, if by that expression abiding comfort be meant. Faith gives safety and spiritual life: abiding peace and establishment follow the sealing of the Spirit. But though an infant has not the strength, activity, and understanding, which he will attain when he arrives to the age of manhood, he is as fully possessed of a principle of life, while he is an infant, as at any time afterwards.

2. We seem to differ likewise as to **the marks of a lively thriving spirit**; at least if any are supposed to be better or surer than those to which our Lord has promised blessedness, Mat. 5:3-9. He has said, "Blessed are those who mourn;" but he has not said, More blessed are those who are comforted. They are, to be sure, more happy at present; but their blessedness consists not in their present comforts, but in those perceptions of Gospel truths which form them to that contrite spirit in which God delights (Isa. 57:18), and which make them capable of Divine comforts, and spiritual hungering and thirstings after them. I would not represent myself as a stranger to peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. In the midst of all my conflicts, I have a heartfelt satisfaction from the Gospel, which nothing else could give. But I mean, though this be with me as an abiding principle, it rarely affords me what I think you intend when you speak of sensible comforts. I cannot feel that warmth of heart, that glowing of love, which the knowledge of such a Savior should inspire. I account it my sin, and I feel it my burden, that I cannot. And when I truly do this, when I can abhor myself for my stupidity, mourn over it, and humbly look up to the Lord for relief against it, I judge my soul to be at such times as much alive to God, as it would be if he saw fit to increase my comfort.

Let me always either rejoice in him, or mourn after him: I would leave the alternative to him, who knows best how to suit his dispensations to my state; and I trust he knows that I do not say this because I set a small value upon his presence. As to the experience of the Apostles, I believe they were patterns to all succeeding believers; but with some regard to the several trials and services to which we may be called in this world, He distributes severally to all his people according to his own will, yet with a wise and gracious accommodation to the circumstances and situations of each. The Apostle Paul connects the aboundings of his consolations with the aboundings of his afflictions, and with the state of the people to whom he preached; 2Co. 1:4-7. And if, instead of preaching the Gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum in the face of persecution, he had lived in a land of liberty, and been confined to a single church, for anything I know his cup might not have run over so often. Succeeding ministers of the Gospel, when called to very laborious and painful services, have, for the like reasons, been often favored with a double portion of that joy which makes hard things easy and bitter things sweet.

And, in general, those who walk humbly before Him, may expect trials; and in proportion, He will favor them with peculiar comforts. It is in this way he in a great measure fulfills his promise of making their strength equal to their day. And I am enabled to trust him in this matter, that if he should at any time see fit to call me to a more difficult and dangerous sphere of service, or lead me into the furnace of affliction, he would, if he saw it needful, support and refresh me by such manifestations of his glory and love, as I know but little of at present. In a word, *a humble, dependent frame of spirit, perseverance in the use of appointed means, care to avoid all occasions of sin, an endeavor to glorify God in our callings, and an eye to Jesus as our all in all—these things are to me sure indications*

that the soul is right, that the Lord is present, and that grace is thriving and in exercise, whether sensible consolations abound or not.

3. I propose the third question, concerning such a **degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent with the remnants of a depraved nature**, because I apprehend one effect of indwelling sin is, to render it morally impossible for us to be entirely faithful to that light and power which God has given us. It may sound like a contradiction to say, we cannot do what we desire: but there are many enigmas in a believer's experience, at least in mine; and I never expect to meet the man that knows his own heart, who will say he is always faithful, diligent, and obedient, to the full extent of his ability: I rather expect he would confess, with me, that he feels a need of more ability, and fresh supplies of grace, to enable him to make a better improvement of what he has already received. If some, as you suppose, in their dullest frames can read the Bible, go to the Throne of Grace, and mourn (as they ought) over what is amiss, I must say for myself, I can, and I cannot. Without doubt I can take the Bible in my hand, and force myself to read it; I can kneel down, and I can see I ought to mourn: but to understand and attend to what I read, to engage my heart in prayer, or to be duly humbled under the sense of so dark and dissipated a state of mind; these things, at some seasons, I can no more do than I can raise the dead; and yet I cannot plead positive inability: I am satisfied that what prevents me is my sin, but it is the sin of my nature, the sin that dwells in me. And I expect it will be thus with me at times, in a greater or less degree, until this body of sin shall be wholly destroyed.

Yet I believe the Lord is with me, even when he seems to be absent, otherwise my corruptions, at such seasons, might easily prevail to

betray me into open or allowed sin, which, blessed be the grace and care of my good Shepherd, is not the case. I know not if I rightly understand the expression, "We may humbly hope, that those things we fall into, which are not in our power to prevent, will not be set to our account." The least of the evils I feel, and which seem most involuntary, if set to my account, would ruin me; and I trust, that even my worst deviations shall not appear against me, because I am a believer in Jesus: and I know, and am sure, that I do not wish to continue in sin that grace may abound. My conscience bears me witness, that I would not desire the rule of duty to be narrowed, or accommodated to my imperfections in a single instance. If the expression only means, that these unavoidable effects of our evil nature should not break our peace of conscience, or discourage us in our approaches to God, I am of the same mind; through mercy I have seldom any more doubt of my acceptance in the Beloved, when in a dark frame, than when I am most favored with liberty.

4. Whether true evangelical humility, and an enlarged view of the grace of God in Christ triumphing over all obstacles, be ordinarily attainable without an experience of declensions, backslidings, and repeated forgiveness? is the last question I shall consider. I dare say you will do me the justice to believe, that I would not advise anyone to run into sin in order to get a knowledge of his own heart: David broke his bones thereby; he obtained an affecting proof of his inability of standing in his own strength, and of the skill and goodness of his Physician who healed him: yet no man in his wits would break his bones for the sake of making experiments, if he were ever so sure they would be well set again. You think that a believer is never more humble in his own eyes, or admires Jesus more, than when he is filled with joy and peace: I readily allow, that the present impressions of Divine love are humbling; however, the direct tendency of gracious consolations in

themselves, is one thing; what evils they may afterwards occasion through the desperate depravity of our hearts, is another. We have a memorable case in point to explain my meaning. The Apostle Paul's recollection of his course while in a natural state, and the singular manner of his conversion, were evidently suited to make him a humble Christian, and he was so. By an especial favor of the Lord, he was afterwards taken up into the third heaven; what he saw or heard there he has not told us, but surely he met with nothing that could have a tendency to make him proud; doubtless he saw Jesus in his glory, and the humble spiritual worship of heaven; a sight which we might deem sufficient to make him walk in self-abasement all the days of his life: but Paul, though an eminent saint, was still liable to the effects of indwelling sin; he was in danger of being exalted through the abundance of revelations, and the Lord, his wise and gracious keeper, saw fit, in order to prevent it, that a messenger from Satan should be given him to buffet him.

Pride is so subtle, that it can gather strength even from those gracious manifestations which seem directly calculated to mortify it; so dangerous, that a messenger from Satan himself may be esteemed a mercy, if overruled and sanctified by the Lord to make or keep us more humble: therefore, though **we can never be too earnest in striving against sin, too watchful in abstaining from all appearance of evil**, and though those who wait upon the Lord may comfortably hope that he will preserve them from such things as would dishonor their profession in the sight of men; yet I apprehend those who appear most to adorn the Gospel in their outward conversation, are conscious of many things between the Lord and their own souls which covers them with shame, and that his tenderness and mercy to them, notwithstanding their perverseness, constrains them with admiration to adopt the language of Micah,

"Who is a God like unto you, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?"

And I believe likewise, that, without such striking and repeated proofs of what is in their hearts, they would not so feelingly enter into the spirit of Job's confession, "Behold, I am vile!" nor would they have such a lively sense of their obligations to the merciful care and faithfulness of their great Shepherd, or of their entire and absolute dependence upon him, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. I find these considerations useful and necessary to reconcile me to my lot. The Lord knows what I need, and what I can bear: gladly would I receive, earnestly would I desire, more of his comforts while here; but if I mourn now, I hope to be comforted in heaven; in the mean time it is more immediately necessary for me, both as a Christian and as a minister, that I should be humbled; the Lord's will be done. I cannot pretend to determine what ministers, or what body of people, come nearest the character of the primitive time; but in my judgment they are the happiest Christians, who have the lowest thoughts of themselves, and in whose eyes Jesus is most glorious and precious.

A; or Grace in the Blade

"First the **blade**, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

Mark 4:28

Dear Sir,

According to your desire, I sit down to give you my general views of a *progressive work of grace*, in the several stages of a believer's experience; which I shall mark by the different characters, A, B, C,

answerable to the distinctions our Lord teaches us to observe from the growth of the corn, Mark 4:28. The Lord leads all his people effectually and savingly to the knowledge of the same essential truths, but in such a variety of methods, that it will be needful, in this disquisition, to set aside, as much as possible, such things as may be only personal and occasional in the experience of each, and to collect those only which in a greater or less degree are common to them all. I shall not therefore give you a copy of my own experience, or of that of any individual; but shall endeavor, as clearly as I can, to state *what the Scripture teaches us concerning the nature and essentials of a work of grace, so far as it will bear a general application to all those who are the subjects of gracious operations.*

By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins; not only strangers to God, but in a state of enmity and opposition to his government and grace. In this respect, whatever difference there may be in the characters of men as members of society, they are all, whether wise or ignorant, whether sober or profane, equally incapable of receiving or approving Divine truths. 1Co. 2:14. On this ground our Lord declares, "No man can come unto me, unless the Father who has sent me draws him." Though the term *Father* most frequently expresses a known and important distinction in the adorable Trinity, I apprehend our Lord sometimes uses it to denote God, or the Divine Nature, in contradistinction from his humanity, as in John 14:9. And this I take to be the sense here: "No man can come unto me unless he is taught of God," and wrought upon by a Divine power. The immediate exertion of this power, according to the economy of salvation, is rather ascribed to the Holy Spirit than to the Father, John 16:8-11. But it is the power of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore severally attributed to the Father, Son, and Spirit: John 5:21, and John 6:44-63; 2Co. 3:18; 2Th. 3:5.

By A; or grace in the blade, I would understand a person who is under the drawings of God, which will infallibly lead him to the Lord Jesus Christ for life and salvation. The beginning of this work is instantaneous. It is effected by a certain kind of light communicated to the soul, to which it was before all utter stranger. The eyes of the understanding are opened and enlightened. The light at first afforded is weak and indistinct, like the morning dawn; but when it is once begun, it will certainly increase and spread to the perfect day. We commonly speak as if conviction of sin was the first work of God upon the soul, that he is in mercy about to draw unto himself. But I think this is inaccurate. Conviction is only a part, or rather an immediate effect, of that first work; and there are many convictions which do not at all spring from it, and therefore are only occasional and temporary, though for a season they may be very sharp, and put a person upon doing many things.

In order to a due conviction of sin, we must previously have some adequate conceptions of the God with whom we have to do. Sin may be feared as dangerous without this; but its nature and demerit can only be understood by being contrasted with the holiness, majesty, goodness, and truth, of the God against whom it is committed. No outward means, no mercies, judgments, or ordinances, can communicate such a discovery of God, or produce such a conviction of sin, without the concurrence of this Divine light and power to the soul. The natural conscience and passions may be indeed so far wrought upon by outward means, as to stir up some desires and endeavors; but if these are not founded in a spiritual apprehension of the perfection's of God, according to the revelation he has made of himself in his word, they will sooner or later come to nothing; and the person affected will either return by degrees to his former ways, 2Pe. 2:20, or he will sink into a self-righteous form of godliness, destitute of the power. Luke 18:11.

And therefore, as there are so many things in the dispensation of the Gospel suited to work upon the natural passions of men, the many woeful miscarriages and apostasies among professors are more to be lamented than wondered at. For though the seed may seem to spring up, and look green for a season, if there is not depth for it to take root, it will surely wither away. We may be unable to judge with certainty upon the first appearance of a religious profession, whether the work be thus deep and spiritual or not; but "the Lord knows those who are his;" and wherever it is real, it is an infallible token of salvation.

Now, as God only thus reveals himself by the medium of Scripture truth, the light received this way leads the soul to the Scripture from whence it springs, and all the leading truths of the word of God soon begin to be perceived and assented to. The evil of sin is acknowledged; the evil of the heart is felt. There may be for a while some efforts to obtain the favor of God by prayer, repentance, and reformation; but, for the most part, it is not very long before these things are proved to be vain and ineffectual. The soul, like the woman mentioned Mark 5:26, wearied with vain expedients, finds itself worse and worse, and is gradually brought to see the necessity and sufficiency of the Gospel salvation.

He may be a believer thus far: That he believes the word of God, sees and feels things to be as they are there described, hates and avoids sin, because he knows it is displeasing to God, and contrary to his goodness: he receives the record which God has given of his Son; he has his heart affected and drawn to Jesus by views of his glory, and of his love to poor sinners; he ventures upon his name and promises as it's only encouragement to come to a Throne of Grace; he waits diligently in the use of all means appointed for the communion and growth of grace; he loves the Lord's people, accounts them the

excellent of the earth, and delights in their conversation. He is longing, waiting, and praying, for a share in those blessings which he believes they enjoy, and can be satisfied with nothing less. He is convinced of the power of Jesus to save him; but, through remaining ignorance and legality, the remembrance of sins previously committed, and the sense of present corruption, he often questions his willingness; and, not knowing the aboundings of grace, and the security of the promises, he fears lest the compassionate Savior should spurn him from his feet.

While he is thus young in the knowledge of the Gospel, burdened with sin, and perhaps beset with Satan's temptations, the Lord, "who gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom," is pleased at times to favor him with cordials, that he may not be swallowed up with over-much sorrow. Perhaps his heart is enlarged in prayer, or under hearing, or some good promise is brought home to His mind, and applied with power and sweetness. He mistakes the nature and design of these comforts, which are not given him to rest in, but to encourage him to press forward. He thinks he is then right because he has them, and fondly hopes to have them always. Then his mountain stands strong. But before long he feels a change: his comforts are withdrawn; he finds no heart to pray; no attention in hearing; indwelling sin revives with fresh strength, and perhaps Satan returns with redoubled rage. Then he is at his wits' end; thinks his hopes were presumptuous, and his comforts delusions. He wants to feel something that may give him a warrant to trust in the free promises of Christ. His views of the Redeemer's gracefulness are very narrow: he sees not the harmony and glory of the Divine attributes in the salvation of a sinner: he sighs for mercy, but fears that justice is against him. However, by these changing dispensations, the Lord is training him up, and bringing him forward. He receives grace from Jesus, whereby he is enabled to fight against sin: his conscience is

tender, his troubles are chiefly spiritual troubles; and he thinks, if he could but attain a sure and abiding sense of his acceptance in the Beloved, hardly any outward trial would be capable of giving him much disturbance.

Indeed, notwithstanding the weakness of his faith, and the prevalence of a legal spirit, which greatly hurts him, there are some things in his present experience which he may, perhaps, look back upon with regret hereafter, when his hope and knowledge will be more established. Particularly that sensibility and keenness of appetite with which he now attends the ordinances, desiring the sincere milk of the word with earnestness and eagerness, as a babe does the breast. He counts the hours from one opportunity to another; and the attention and desire with which he hears, may be read in his countenance. His zeal is likewise lively; and may be, for lack of more experience, too importunate and forward. He has a love for souls, and a concern for the glory of God; which, though it may at some times create him trouble, and at others be mixed with some undue motions of self, yet in its principle is highly desirable and commendable. John 18:10.

The grace of God influences both the understanding and the affections. Warm affections, without knowledge, can rise no higher than superstition; and that knowledge which does not influence the heart and affections will only make a hypocrite. The true believer is rewarded in both respects; yet we may observe, that though 'A' is not without knowledge, this state is more usually remarkable for the warmth and liveliness of the affections. On the other hand, as the work advances, though the affections are not left out, yet it seems to be carried on principally in the understanding. The old Christian has more solid, judicious, connected views of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glories of his

person and redeeming love: hence his hope is more established, his dependence more simple, and his peace and strength, more abiding and uniform, than in the case of a young convert; but the latter has, for the most part, the advantage in point of sensible fervency.

A tree is most valuable when laden with ripe fruit, but it has a peculiar beauty when in blossom. It is spring-time with 'A'. He is in bloom, and, by the grace and blessing of the heavenly Farmer, will bear fruit in old age. His faith is weak, but his heart is warm. He will seldom venture to think himself a believer; but he sees, and feels, and does those things which no one could, unless the Lord was with him. The very desire and bent of his soul is to God, and to the word of his grace. His knowledge is but small, but it is growing every day. If he is not a *father* or a *young man* in grace, he is a dear *child*. The Lord has visited his heart, delivered him from the love of sin, and fixed his desires supremely upon Jesus Christ. The spirit of bondage is gradually departing from him, and the hour of liberty, which he longs for, is approaching, when, by a farther discovery of the glorious Gospel, it shall be given him to know his acceptance, and to rest upon the Lord's finished salvation. We shall then take notice of him by the name of 'B', in a second letter, if you are not unwilling that I should prosecute the subject.

B; or, Grace in the Ear

"First the blade, then the **ear**, after that the full corn in the ear."
Mark 4:28

Dear Sir,

The manner of the Lord's work in the hearts of his people is not easily traced; though the fact is certain, and the evidence demonstrable from Scripture. In attempting to explain it, we can only speak in general, and are at a loss to form such a description as

shall take in the immense variety of cases which occur in the experience of believers. I have already attempted such a general delineation of a young convert, under the character of 'A', and am now to speak of him by the name of 'B'.

This state I suppose to commence, when the soul, after an interchange of hopes and fears, according to the different frames it passes through, is brought to rest in Jesus, by a spiritual apprehension of his complete suitableness and sufficiency, as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of all who trust in him, and is enabled by an appropriating faith to say, "He is mine, and I am his." There are various degrees of this persuasion; it is of a growing nature, and is capable of increase so long as we remain in this world. I call it *assurance*, when it arises from a simple view of the grace and glory of the Savior, independent of our sensible frames and feelings, so as to enable us to answer all objections, from unbelief and Satan, with the Apostle's words, "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died; yes rather, who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Rom. 8:34. This, in my judgment, does not belong to the essence of faith, so that 'B' should be deemed more truly a believer than 'A', but to the establishment of faith. And now that faith is stronger, it has more to grapple with.

I think the characteristic of the state of 'A' is desire, and of 'B' is conflict. Not that B's desires have subsided, or that 'A' was a stranger to conflict; but as there was a sensible eagerness and keenness in A's desires, which, perhaps, is seldom known to be equally strong afterwards, so there are usually trials and exercises in B's experience; something different in their kind and sharper in their measure than what 'A' was exposed to, or indeed had strength to endure. 'A', like Israel, has been delivered from Egypt by great power and a

stretched-out arm, has been pursued and terrified by many enemies, has given himself up for lost again and again. He has at last seen his enemies destroyed, and has sang the song of Moses and the Lamb upon the banks of the Red Sea. Then he commences 'B'. Perhaps, like Israel, he thinks his difficulties are at an end, and expects to go on rejoicing until he enters the promised land. But, alas! his difficulties are in a manner but beginning; he has a wilderness before him, of which he is not aware. The Lord is now about to suit his dispensations to humble and to prove him, and to show him what is in his heart, that he may do him good at the latter end, and that all the glory may redound to his own free grace.

Since the Lord hates and abhors sin, and teaches his people whom he loves to hate it likewise, it might seem desirable (and all things are equally easy to him), that at the same time they are delivered from the guilt and reigning power of sin, they should likewise be perfectly freed from the defilement of indwelling sin, and be made fully conformable to him at once. His wisdom has, however, appointed otherwise. But, from the above premises, of God's hatred of sin, and his love to his people, I think we may certainly conclude, that he would not allow sin to remain in them, if he did not purpose to overrule it, for the fuller manifestation of the glory of his grace and wisdom, and for the making his salvation more precious to their souls.

It is, however, his command, and therefore their duty: yes, further, from the new nature he has given them, it is their desire to watch and strive against sin; and to propose the mortification of the whole body of sin, and the advancement of sanctification in their hearts, as their great and constant aim, to which they are to have a habitual persevering regard. Upon this plan 'B' sets out. The knowledge of our acceptance with God, and of our everlasting security in Christ, has in

itself the same tendency upon earth as it will have in heaven, and would, in proportion to the degree of evidence and clearness, produce the same effects, of continual love, joy, peace, gratitude, and praise, if there was nothing to counteract it. But 'B' is not all *spirit*. A depraved nature still cleaves to him; and he has the seeds of every natural corruption yet remaining in his heart. He lives likewise in a world that is full of snares, and occasions, suited to draw forth those corruptions; and he is surrounded by invisible spiritual enemies, the extent of whose power and subtlety he is yet to learn by painful experience. 'B' knows, in general, the nature of his Christian warfare, and sees his right to live upon Jesus for righteousness and strength. He is willing to endure hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and believes, that, though he may be sore thrust at that he may fall, the Lord will be his stay. He knows, that his heart is "deceitful and desperately wicked;" but he does not, he cannot, know at first, the full meaning of that expression.

Yet it is for the Lord's glory, and will in the end make his grace and love still more precious, that 'B' should find new and mortifying proofs of all evil nature as he goes on, such as he could not once have believed had they been foretold to him, as in the case of Peter, Mark 14:29. And, in effect, the abominations of the heart do not appear in their full strength and aggravation, but in the case of one who, like 'B', has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and rejoiced in his salvation.

The exceeding sinfulness of sin is manifested, not so much by its breaking through the restraint of threatening and commands, as by its being capable of acting against light and against love. Thus it was with Hezekiah. He had been a faithful and zealous servant of the Lord for many years; but I suppose he knew more of God, and of himself, in the time of his sickness, than he had ever done before. The Lord, who had signally defended him from Sennacherib, was

pleased likewise to raise him from the borders of the grave by a miracle, and prolonged the time of his life in answer to prayer. It is plain, from the song which he penned upon his recovery, that he was greatly affected with the mercies he had received; yet still there was something in his heart which he knew not, and which it was for the Lord's glory he should be made sensible of, and therefore he was pleased to leave him to himself. It is the only instance in which he is said to have been left to himself, and the only instance in which his conduct is condemned.

I apprehend, that, in the state of 'B', that is, for a season after we have known the Lord, we have usually the most sensible and distressing experience of our evil natures. I do not say, that it is necessary that we should be left to fall into gross outward sin, in order to know what is in our hearts; though I believe many have thus fallen, whose hearts, under a former sense of redeeming love, have been as truly set against sin, as the hearts of others who have been preserved from such outward falls. The Lord makes some of his children examples and warnings to others, as he pleases. Those who are spared, and whose worst deviations are only known to the Lord and themselves, have great reason to be thankful. I am sure I have: the merciful Lord has not allowed me to make any considerable blot in my profession during the time I have been numbered among his people. But I have nothing to boast of herein. It has not been owing to my wisdom, watchfulness, or spirituality, though in the main he has not allowed me to live in the neglect of his appointed means. But I hope to go softly all my days under the remembrance of many things, for which I have as great cause to be abased before him, as if I had been left to sin grievously in the sight of men. Yet, with respect to my acceptance in the Beloved, I know not if I have had a doubt of a quarter of an hour's continuance for many years past. But, oh! the multiplied instances of stupidity, ingratitude, impatience, and

rebellion, to which my conscience has been witness! And as every heart knows its own bitterness, I have generally heard the like complaints from others of the Lord's people with whom I have conversed, even from those who have appeared to be eminently gracious and spiritual.

'B' does not meet with these things perhaps at first, nor every day. The Lord appoints occasions and turns in life, which try our spirits. There are particular seasons when temptations are suited to our frames, tempers, and situations; and there are times when he is pleased to withdraw, and to permit Satan's approach, that we may feel how vile we are in ourselves. **We are prone to spiritual pride, to self-dependence, to vain confidence, to creature attachments, and a train of evils.** The Lord often discovers to us one sinful disposition by exposing us to another. He sometimes shows us what he can do for us and in us; and at other times how little we can do, and how unable we are to stand without him.

By a variety of these exercises, through the over-ruling and edifying influences of the Holy Spirit, 'B' is trained up in a growing knowledge of himself and of the Lord. He learns to be more distrustful of his own heart, and to suspect a snare in every step he takes. The dark and disconsolate hours which he has brought upon himself in times past, make him doubly prize the light of God's countenance, and teach him to dread whatever might grieve the Spirit of God, and cause him to withdraw again. The repeated and multiplied pardons which he has received, increase his admiration of, and the sense of his obligations to, the rich sovereign abounding mercy of the covenant. Much has been forgiven him, therefore he loves much, and therefore he knows how to forgive and pity others. He does not call evil good, or good evil; but his own experiences teach him tenderness and forbearance. He exercises a spirit of meekness towards those

who are overtaken in a fault; and his attempts to restore such, are according to the pattern of the Lord's dealings with himself.

In a word, B's character, in my judgment, is complete; and he becomes a 'C', when the habitual frame of his heart answers to that passage in the Prophet Eze. 16:63; "That you may remember, and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more (to boast, complain, or censure), because of your shame, when I am pacified towards you for all that you have done, says the Lord God."

C; or, The full corn in the ear

"First the blade, then the ear, after that **the full corn in the ear**".
Mark 4:28

Dear Sir,

By way of distinction, I assigned to 'A' the characteristic of **desire**, to 'B' that of **conflict**. I can think of no single word more descriptive of the state of 'C' than **contemplation**. His eminence, in comparison of 'A', does not consist in the sensible warmth and fervency of his affections: in this respect many of the most exemplary believers have looked back with a kind of regret upon the time of their espousals, when, though their judgments were but imperfectly formed, and their views of Gospel truths were very indistinct, they felt a fervor of spirit, the remembrance of which is both humbling and refreshing; and yet they cannot recall the same sensations. Nor is he properly distinguished from 'B' by a consciousness of his acceptance in the Beloved, and an ability of calling God his Father; for this I have supposed 'B' has attained to.

Though, as there is a growth in every grace, 'C', having had his views of the Gospel, and of the Lord's faithfulness and mercy, confirmed by

a longer experience, his assurance is of course more stable and more simple, than when he first saw himself safe from all condemnation. Neither has 'C', properly speaking, any more strength or stock of grace inherent in himself than 'B', or even than 'A'. **He is in the same state of absolute dependence, as incapable of performing spiritual acts, or of resisting temptations by his own power, as he was at the first day of his setting out.** Yet in a sense he is much stronger, because he has a more feeling and constant sense of his own weakness. The Lord has been long teaching him this lesson by a train of various dispensations; and through grace he can say, that he has not suffered so many things in vain. *His heart has deceived him so often, that he is now in a good measure weaned from trusting to it; and therefore he does not meet with so many disappointments.* And having found again and again the vanity of all other helps, he is now taught to go to the Lord at once for "grace to help in every time of need." Thus he is strong, not in himself, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

But C's happiness and superiority to 'B' lies chiefly in this, that, by the Lord's blessing on the use of means—such as prayer, reading and hearing of the word, and by a sanctified improvement of what he has seen of the Lord, and of his own heart, in the course of his experience—*he has attained clearer, deeper, and more comprehensive views of the mystery of redeeming love;* of the glorious excellency of the Lord Jesus, in his person, offices, grace, and faithfulness; of the harmony and glory of all the Divine perfection's manifested in and by him to the church; of the stability, beauty, fullness, and certainty of the Holy Scriptures; and of the heights, depths, lengths, and breadths of the love of God in Christ. Thus, though his sensible feelings may not be so warm as when he was in the state of 'A', his judgment is more solid, his mind more fixed, his thoughts more habitually exercised upon the things within the veil. His great business is to behold the

glory of God in Christ; and by beholding, he is changed into the same image, and brings forth in an eminent and uniform manner the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. His contemplation's are not barren speculations, but have a real influence, and enable him to exemplify the Christian character to more advantage, and with more consistence, than can in the present state of things be expected either from 'A' or 'B'. The following particulars may illustrate my meaning.

I. Humility. A measure of this grace is to be expected in every true Christian: but it can only appear in proportion to the knowledge they have of Christ and of their own hearts. It is a part of C's daily employment to look back upon the way by which the Lord has led him; and while he reviews the Ebenezers he has set up all along the road, he sees, in almost an equal number, the monuments of his own perverse returns, and how he has in a thousand instances rendered to the Lord, evil for good. Comparing these things together, he can without affectation adopt the Apostle's language, and style himself "less than the least of all saints, and of sinners the chief." 'A' and 'B' know that they ought to be humbled; but 'C' is truly so, and feels the force of that text which I mentioned in my last; Eze. 16:63. Again, as he knows most of himself, so he has seen most of the Lord. The apprehension of infinite Majesty combined with infinite Love, makes him shrink into the dust. From the exercise of this grace he, derives two others, which are exceedingly ornamental, and principal branches of the mind which was in Christ.

The one is **submission to the will of God.** The views he has of his own vileness, unworthiness, and ignorance, and of the Divine sovereignty, wisdom, and love—teach him to be content in every state, and to bear his appointed lot of suffering with resignation,

according to the language of David in a time of affliction, "I was silent, and opened not my mouth, because you did it."

The other is, **tenderness of spirit towards his fellow-Christians**. He cannot but judge of their conduct according to the rule of the word. But his own heart, and the knowledge he has acquired of the snares of the world, and the subtlety of Satan, teach him to make all due allowances, and qualify him for admonishing and restoring, in the spirit of meekness, those who have been overtaken in a fault. Here 'A' is usually blameable; the warmth of his zeal, not being duly corrected by a sense of his own imperfections, betrays him often into a censorious spirit. But 'C' can bear with 'A' likewise, because he has been so himself, and he will not expect green fruit to be ripe.

II. Spirituality. A spiritual taste, and a disposition to account all things as worthless and vanity—in comparison of the knowledge and love of God in Christ—are essential to a true Christian. The world can never be his prevailing choice; 1Jo. 2:13. Yet we are renewed but in part, and are prone to an undue attachment to worldly things. Our spirits cleave to the dust, in defiance to the dictates of our better judgments; and I believe the Lord seldom gives his people a considerable victory over this evil principle, until he has let them feel how deeply it is rooted in their hearts. We may often see people entangled and clogged in this respect, of whose sincerity in the main we cannot justly doubt; especially upon some sudden and unexpected turn in life, which brings them into a situation they have not been accustomed to.

A considerable part of our trials are mercifully appointed to wean us from this worldly propensity; and it is gradually weakened by the

Lord's showing us at one time the vanity of the creature, and at another his own excellence and all-sufficiency.

Even 'C' is not perfect in this respect; but he is more sensible of the evil of such attachments, more humbled for them, more watchful against them, and more delivered from them. He still feels a fetter, but he longs to be free. His allowed desires are brought to a point; and he sees nothing worth a serious thought, but communion with God and progress in holiness.

Whatever outward changes 'C' may meet with, he will in general be the same man still. He has learned, with the Apostle, not only to suffer need, but (which is perhaps the harder lesson) how to *abound*. A palace would be a prison to him, without the Lord's presence; and with the Lord's presence, a prison would be a palace. From hence arises a peaceful reliance upon the Lord: he has nothing which he cannot commit into his hands, which he is not habitually aiming to resign to his disposal. Therefore he is not afraid of evil tidings; but when the hearts of others shake like the leaves of a tree, he is fixed, trusting in the Lord, who he believes can and will make good every loss, sweeten every bitter, and appoint all things to work together for his advantage. He sees that the time is short, lives upon the foretastes of glory, and therefore accounts not his life, or any inferior concernment, dear, so that he may finish his course with joy.

III. A union of heart to the glory and will of God, is another noble distinction of C's spirit. The glory of God, and the good of his people, are inseparably connected. But of these great ends the first is unspeakably the highest and the most important, and into which everything else will be finally resolved. Now, in proportion as we advance nearer to him, our judgment, aim, and end will be conformable to his, and his glory will have the highest place in our

hearts. At first it is not so, or but very imperfectly. Our concern is chiefly about ourselves; nor can it be otherwise. The convinced soul inquires, 'What shall I do to be saved?' The young convert is intent upon sensible comforts; and in the seasons when he sees his interest secure, the prospect of the troubles he may meet with in life makes him often wish for an early death, that he may be at rest, and avoid the heat and burden of the day.

But 'C' has attained to more enlarged views: he has a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which would be importunate if he considered only himself; but his chief desire is, that God may be glorified in him, whether by his life or by his death. He is not his own; nor does he desire to be His own; but, so that the power of Jesus may be manifested in him, he will take pleasure in infirmities, in distresses, in temptations; and, though he longs for heaven, would be content to live as long as Methuselah upon earth, if, by anything he could do or suffer, the will and glory of God might be promoted. And though he loves and adores the Lord for what he has done and suffered for him, delivered him from, and appointed him to; yet he loves and adores him likewise with a more simple and direct love, in which *self* is in a manner forgotten, from the consideration of God's glorious excellence and perfections, as he is in himself. That God in Christ is glorious over all, and blessed forever, is the very joy of his soul; and his heart can frame no higher wish, than that the sovereign, wise, holy will of God may be accomplished in him, and all his creatures. Upon this grand principle his prayers, schemes, and actions, are formed. Thus 'C' is already made like the angels; and, so far as is consistent with the inseparable remnants of a fallen nature, the will of God is regarded by him upon earth as it is by the inhabitants of heaven.

The power of Divine grace in 'C' may be exemplified in a great variety of situations. 'C' may be rich or poor, learned or illiterate, of a lively natural spirit, or of a more slow and phlegmatic constitution. He may have a comparatively smooth, or a remarkably thorny path in life; he may be a minister or layman. These circumstantials will give some tincture and difference in appearance to the work; but the work itself is the same; and we must, as far as possible, make proper allowances for each, in order to form a right judgment of the life of faith.

The outward expression of grace may be heightened and set off to advantage by many things which are merely natural, such as evenness of temper, good sense, a knowledge of the world, and the like; and it may be darkened by things which are not properly sinful, but unavoidable, such as lowness of spirit, weak abilities, and pressure of temptations, which may have effects that those who have not had experience in the same things cannot properly account for. A double quantity of real grace, if I may so speak, that has a double quantity of hindrances to conflict with, will not be easily observed, unless these hindrances are likewise known and attended to; and a smaller measure of grace may appear great, when its exercise meets with no remarkable obstruction. For these reasons, we can never be competent judges of each other, because we cannot be competently acquainted with the whole complex case.

But our great and merciful High Priest knows the whole: he considers our frame, "remembers that we are but dust;" makes gracious allowances; pities, bears, accepts, and approves, with unerring judgment. The sun, in his daily course, beholds nothing so excellent and honorable upon earth as 'C', though perhaps he may be confined to a cottage, and is little known or noticed by men. But he is the object and residence of Divine love, the charge of angels, and ripening for everlasting glory. Happy 'C'! his toils, sufferings, and

exercises, will be soon at an end; soon his desires will be accomplished; and He who has loved him, and redeemed him with his own blood, will receive him to himself, with a "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter you into the joy of your Lord."

If this representation is agreeable to the Scriptures, how greatly are they mistaken, and how much to be pitied, who, while they make profession of the Gospel—seem to have no idea of *the effects it is designed to produce upon the hearts of believers*, but either allow themselves in a worldly spirit and conversation, or indulge their unsanctified tempers, by a fierce contention for names, notions, and parties. May the Lord give to you and to me daily to grow in the experience of that wisdom which "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

On Hearing Sermons

Dear Sir,

I am glad to find that the Lord has at length been pleased to fix you in a favored situation, where you have frequent opportunities of hearing the Gospel. This is a great privilege; but, like all other outward privileges, it **requires grace and wisdom to make a due improvement of it**; and the great abundance of ordinances you enjoy, though in itself a blessing, is attended with snares, which, unless they are carefully guarded against, may *hinder* rather than *promote* your edification. I gladly embrace the occasion you afford me, of offering you my advice upon this subject. A remembrance of the mistakes I have myself formerly committed, and the observations I have made upon the conduct of professors, considered as hearers,

will perhaps in some measure qualify me for the task you have assigned me.

All the faithful ministers of the Gospel are servants and ambassadors of Christ. They are all called and furnished by his Holy Spirit. They all speak in his name; and **their success in the discharge of their office, be it more or less, depends entirely upon his blessing.** So far they are all upon a par. But in the measure of their ministerial abilities, and in the peculiar **matter** of their preaching, there is a great variety. There are "diversities of gifts from the same Spirit; and he distributes to every man severally according to his own will." Some are better in alarming the careless, others in administering consolation to the wounded conscience. Some are set more especially for the establishment and confirmation of the Gospel doctrines; others are skillful in solving theological points. Others are more excellent in enforcing practical godliness; and others, having been led through depths of temptation and spiritual distress, are best acquainted with the various workings of the heart, and know best how to speak a word in season to weary and exercised souls. Perhaps no true minister of the Gospel (for all such are taught of God) is wholly deficient in all of these areas; but few, if any, are remarkably and equally excellent in managing them all.

Again, as to their **manner**; some are more popular and heart-stirring, but at the same time more general and diffuse; while the lack of that life and earnestness in delivery is compensated in others by the closeness, accuracy, and depth of their compositions. In this variety of gifts, the Lord has a gracious regard to the different tastes and dispositions, as well as to the needs, of his people: and by their combined effects the complete system of his truth is illustrated, and the good of his church promoted with the highest advantage; while his ministers, like officers assigned to different stations in an army,

have not only the good of the whole in view, but each one his particular charge to maintain.

This would be more evidently the case, if the remaining depravity of our hearts did not afford Satan but too much advantage in his subtle attempts to hurt and ensnare us. But, alas! how often has he prevailed to infuse a spirit of **envy** or dislike in ministers towards each other; to withdraw hearers from their proper concerns, by dividing them into parties, and stirring them up to contend for a Paul, an Apollos, or a Cephas, for their own favorites, to the disparagement of others, who are equally dear to the Lord, and faithful in his service? You may think my preamble long: but I shall deduce my advices chiefly from it; taking it for granted, that to you I have no need of proving at large what I have advanced.

As the gifts and talents of ministers are different, I advise you to choose for your stated pastor and teacher, one whom you find most suitable, upon the whole, to your own taste, and whom you are likely to hear with the most pleasure and advantage. Use some deliberation and much prayer in this matter. Entreat the Lord, who knows better than you do yourself, to guide you **where your soul may be best fed**, and when your choice is fixed, you will do well to make a point of attending his ministry constantly, I mean at least at the stated times of worship on the Lord's day. I do not say, that no circumstance will justify your going elsewhere at such times occasionally; but, I think, the seldomer you are absent the better.

A stated and regular attendance encourages the minister, affords a good example to the congregation; and a hearer is more likely to meet with what is directly suited to his own case, from a minister who knows him, and expects to see him—than he can be from one who is a stranger. Especially, I would not wish you to be absent for

the sake of gratifying your curiosity, to hear some new preacher, who you have perhaps been told is a very extraordinary man; for such occasions might possibly be available almost every week. What I have observed of many, who run about unseasonably after new preachers, has reminded me of Pro. 27:8, "As a bird that wanders from her nest, so is the man that wanders from his place."

Such *unsettled hearers* seldom thrive: they usually grow wise in their own conceits, have their heads filled with notions, acquire a dry, critical, and censorious spirit; and are more intent upon disputing who is the best preacher, than upon obtaining benefit to themselves from what they hear.

If you could find a man, indeed, who had a power in himself of dispensing a blessing to your soul, you might follow him from place to place; but as the blessing is in the Lord's hands, you will be more likely to receive it by waiting where his providence has placed you, and where he has met with you before.

But as human nature is prone to extremes, permit me to give you a caution on the other hand. If the minister under whom you stately attend, is made very acceptable to you, you will be in the less danger of slighting him. *But be careful that you do not slight any other minister of Christ.* If, therefore, when you come to hear your own preacher, you find another in the pulpit, do not let your looks tell him, that, if you had known he had been there, you would not have come. I wish indeed you may never think so in your heart: but though we cannot prevent evil thoughts from rising in our minds, we should endeavor to combat and suppress them. Some people are so curious, or rather so weak, that, if their favorite minister is occasionally absent, they hardly think it worth their while to hear another. A judicious and faithful minister, in this case, instead of

being delighted with such a mark of peculiar attachment to himself, will be grieved to think that they have profited no more by his labors; for it is his desire to win souls, not to himself, but to Jesus Christ.

I hope you, my friend, will always attend the ordinances with a view to the Lord's presence; and when you are in your proper place, consider the preacher (if he preaches the truth) as one providentially and expressly sent by the Lord to you at that time; and that you could not choose better for yourself, all things considered, than he has chosen for you. Do not limit the Almighty, by confining your expectations to a single instrument. If you do, you will probably procure your own disappointment. If you fix your hopes upon the *man*, the Lord may withhold his blessing, and then the best men and the best sermons will prove to you but as clouds without water.

But, besides the more stated seasons of worship on the Lord's day, you have many opportunities of hearing sermons occasionally in the course of the week; and thus you may partake of that variety of gifts which I have already spoken of. This will be either a benefit or otherwise, according to the use you make of it. I would recommend to you to improve these occasions, but under some restrictions.

In the first place, *be cautious that you do not degenerate into the spirit of a mere hearer, so as to place the chief stress of your profession upon running hither and there after preachers.* There are many who are always upon the wing; and, without a due regard to what is incumbent upon them in the shop, in the family, or in private devotion—they seem to think they were sent into the world only to hear sermons, and to hear as many in a day as they possibly can. Such people may be fitly compared to Pharaoh's lean cows; they devour a great deal; but, for lack of a proper digestion, they do not

flourish: their souls are lean: they have little solid comfort; and their profession abounds more in *leaves* than in *fruit*.

If the twelve Apostles were again upon earth, and you could hear them all every week; yet, if you were not attentive to the private devotional duties; if you did not allow yourself time for reading, meditation, and prayer; and if you did not likewise conscientiously attend to the concerns of your particular calling, and the discharge of your duties in family life; I would be more ready to blame your indiscretion, than to admire your zeal. Everything is beautiful in its season; and if one duty frequently jostles out another, it is a sign either of a weak judgment, or of a wrong turn of mind. *No public ordinances can make amends for the neglect of secret prayer; nor will the most diligent attendance upon them justify us in the neglect of those duties, which, by the command and appointment of God, we owe to our families and society.*

Again, as it is our trial to live in a day wherein so many contentions and winds of strange doctrines abound, I hope you will watch and pray that you may not have itching ears, inclining you to hearken after novel and singular opinions, and the erroneous sentiments of men of unstable minds, who are not sound in the faith. I have known people who, from a blamable curiosity, have gone to hear such, not for the sake of edification, which they could not expect, but to know what they had to say, supposing that they themselves were too well established in the truth to be hurt by them. But the experiment (without a just and lawful call) is presumptuous and dangerous. In this way many have been hurt, yes, many have been overthrown. **Error is like poison;** the subtlety, quickness, and force of its operation is often amazing. As we pray not to be led into temptation, we should take care not to run into it willfully. If the Lord has shown

you what is right, it is not worth your while to know (if you could know it) how many ways there are of being wrong.

Farther: I advise you, when you hear a Gospel sermon, and it is not in all respects to your satisfaction, be not too hasty to lay the whole blame upon the preacher. The Lord's ministers have not much to say in their own behalf. They feel (it is to be hoped) their own weakness and defects, and the greatness and difficulty of their work. They are conscious that their warmest endeavors to proclaim the Savior's glory are too cold; and their most importunate addresses to the consciences of men are too faint: and sometimes they are burdened with such discouragements, that even their enemies would pity them if they knew their case. Indeed, they have much to be ashamed of; but it will be more useful for you, who are a hearer, to consider whether the fault may not possibly be in yourself. Perhaps you thought too highly of the man, and expected too much from him; or perhaps you thought too lowly of him, and expected too little. In the former case, the Lord justly disappointed you; in the latter, you received according to your faith. Perhaps you neglected to pray for him; and then, though he might be useful to others, it is not at all strange that he was not so to you. Or possibly you have indulged a trifling spirit, and brought a dearth and deadness upon your own soul; for which you had not been duly humbled, and the Lord chose that time to rebuke you.

Lastly: as a hearer, *you have a right to try all doctrines by the word of God; and it is your duty so to do.* Faithful ministers will remind you of this: they will not wish to hold you in an implicit and blind obedience to what they say, upon their own authority, nor desire that you should follow them further than they have the Scripture for their warrant. They would not be lords over your conscience, but helpers of your joy. Prize this Gospel liberty, which sets you free from the

doctrines and commandments of men; but do not abuse it to the purposes of pride and self. *There are hearers who make themselves, and not the Scripture, the standard of their judgment.* They attend not so much to be instructed, as to pass their sentence. To them, the pulpit is the bar at which the minister stands to take his trial before them; a bar at which few escape censure, from judges at once so severe and inconsistent. For, as these censors are not all of a mind, and perhaps agree in nothing so much as in the opinion they have of their own wisdom, it has often happened, that, in the course of one and the same sermon, the minister has been condemned both as a Legalist and an Antinomian; both as too high in his notions, and too low; both as having too little action, and too much. Oh! this hateful spirit, which prompts hearers to pronounce *ex cathedra* as if they were infallible, breaks in upon the rights of private judgment, even in matters not essential, and makes a man an offender for a word. This spirit is one frequent troublesome evil, which springs from the corruption of the heart, when the Lord affords the means of grace in great abundance. How highly would some of the Lord's hidden ones, who are destitute of the ordinances, prize the blessing of a preached Gospel, with which too many professors seem to be surfeited! I pray God to preserve you from such a spirit (which I fear is spreading, and infects us like the pestilence), and to guide you in all things.

Temptations

Dear Sir,

What can you expect from me on the subject of **temptation**, with which you have been so much more conversant than myself? On this point I am more disposed to receive information from you, than to

offer my advice. You, by the Lord's appointment, have had much business and exercise on these great waters; whereas the knowledge I have of what passes there, I have gained more from observation than from actual experience. I shall not wonder if you think I write like a novice: however, your request has the force of a command with me. I shall give you my thoughts; or rather, shall take occasion to write, not so much to you as to others, who, though they may be plunged in the depths of temptation, have not yet seen so much of the wisdom and power of God in these dispensations as yourself. I shall first inquire, Why the Lord permits some of his people to suffer such violent assaults from the powers of darkness; and then suggest a few advices to tempted souls.

I. WHY does the Lord allow his people to be tempted? The temptations of Satan (which, though not the most painful, are in reality the most dangerous) do not directly belong to my present design. I mean those by which he is too successful in drawing many professors from the path of duty, in filling them with spiritual pride, or lulling them into carnal security. In these attempts he is often most powerful and prevalent when he is least perceived; he seldom distresses those whom he can deceive. It is chiefly when these endeavors fail, that he fights against the peace of the soul. He hates the Lord's people, grudges them all their privileges and all their comforts; and will do what he can to disquiet them, because he cannot prevail against them. And though the Lord sets such bounds to his rage as he cannot pass, and limits him both as to manner and time, he is often pleased to allow him to vent his malice to a considerable degree; not to gratify Satan, but to humble and prove them; to show them what is in their hearts, to make them truly sensible of their immediate and absolute dependence upon himself, and to quicken them to watchfulness and prayer.

Though temptations, in their own nature, are grievous and dreadful, yet when, by the grace of God, they are productive of these effects, they deserve to be numbered among the "all things which are appointed to work together for the good of those who love him." The light carriage, vain confidence, and woeful backslidings of many professors, might perhaps (speaking after the manner of men) have been in some measure prevented, had they been more acquainted with this spiritual warfare, and had they drunk of the cup of temptation, which but few of those who walk humbly and uprightly are exempted from tasting of, though not all in the same degree.

One gracious end, therefore, that the Lord has in permitting his people to be tempted, is for the prevention of greater evils, that they may not grow proud or careless, or be ensnared by the corrupt customs of the world. In this view, I doubt not, however burdensome your trials may at some seasons prove, you are enabled, by your composed judgment, to rejoice in them, and be thankful for them. You know what you suffer now; but you know not what might have been the consequence, if you had never smarted by the fiery darts of the wicked one. You might have been taken in a more fatal snare, and been numbered with those who, by their grievous declensions and falls, have caused the ways of truth to be evil spoken of.

Another gracious design is, for the manifestation of his power, and wisdom, and grace, in supporting the soul under such pressures as are evidently beyond its own strength to sustain. A bush on fire, and not consumed, engaged the attention of Moses. This emblem is generally applicable to the state of a Christian in the present life, but never more so than when he is in the fire of temptation.

And though his heaviest sufferings of this kind are usually hidden from the notice of his fellow-creatures, yet there are other eyes

always upon him. "We are," says the Apostle, "a spectacle to the world;" not only to men, but "to angels" also. Many things probably pass in the invisible state, in which we have nearer concerns than we are ordinarily aware of. The beginning of the book of Job throws some light upon this point, and informs us of that which we would have been otherwise totally ignorant, of the true cause of his uncommon sufferings. Satan had challenged him, charged him as a hypocrite, and thought he was able to prove him one, if he could have permission to attack him. The Lord, for the vindication of Job's integrity, and for the manifestation of his own faithfulness and power in favor of his servant, was pleased to give Satan permission to try what he could do. The experiment answered many good purposes: Job was humbled, yet approved; his friends were instructed; Satan was confuted, and disappointed; and the wisdom and mercy of the Lord, in his darkest dispensations towards his people, were gloriously illustrated. This contest and the event were recorded for the direction and encouragement of his church to the end of time.

Satan's malice is not abated; and though he has met with millions of disappointments, he still, like Goliath of old, defies the armies of God's Israel: he challenges the stoutest, and "desires to have them, that he may sift them as wheat." Indeed, he is far an overmatch for them, considered as in themselves; but though they are weak, their Redeemer is mighty, and they are forever secured by his love and intercession. "The Lord knows those who are his, and no weapon formed against them can prosper." That this may appear with the fullest evidence, Satan is allowed to assault them.

We handle vessels of glass or china with caution, and endeavor to preserve them from falls and blows, because we know they are easily broken. But if a man had the art of making glass malleable, and, like

iron, capable of bearing the stroke of a hammer without breaking, it is probable, that, instead of locking it carefully up, he would rather, for the commendation of his skill, permit many to attempt to break it, when he knew their attempts would be in vain. Believers are compared to earthen vessels, liable in themselves to be destroyed by a small blow; but they are so strengthened and tempered by the power and supply of Divine grace, that the fiercest efforts of their fiercest enemies against them may be compared to the dashing of waves against a rock. And that this may be known and noticed, they are exposed to many trials; but the united and repeated assaults of the men of the world, and the powers of darkness, afford but the more incontestable demonstration, that the Lord is with them of a truth, and that his strength is made perfect in their weakness. Surely this thought, my friend, will afford you consolation; and you will be content to suffer, if God may be glorified by you and in you.

Further: By enduring temptation, you, as a living member of the body of Christ, have the honor of being conformed to your Head. He suffered, being tempted; and because he loves you, he calls you to a participation of his sufferings, and to taste of his cup: not the cup of the wrath of God; this he drank alone, and he drank it all. But in affliction he allows his people to have fellowship with him; thus they fill up the measure of his sufferings, and can say, 'As he was, so are we in the world.' Marvel not that the world hates you, neither marvel that Satan rages against you. Should not the disciple be as his Lord? Can the servant expect or desire peace from the avowed enemies of his Master? We are to follow his steps; and **can we wish, if it were possible, to walk in a path strewed with flowers, when his was strewed with thorns?** Let us not be terrified by the power of our adversaries; which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to us of salvation, and that of God. To us it is given, not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake.

If we would make peace with the world—the world would let us alone; if we could be content to walk in the ways of sin—Satan would give us no disturbance; but because grace has rescued us from his dominion, and the love of Jesus constrains us to live to him alone, therefore the enemy, like a lion robbed of his prey, roars against us. He roars, but he cannot devour; he plots and rages, but he cannot prevail; he disquiets, but he cannot destroy. If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him: in due time he will bruise Satan under our feet, make us more than conquerors, and place us where we shall hear the voice of war no more, forever.

Again: As by temptations we are conformed to the life of Christ, so likewise, by the sanctifying power of grace, temptations are made subservient to advance our conformity to his image; particularly as we thereby acquire a sympathy and fellow-feeling with our suffering brethren. This is eminently a branch of the mind which was in Christ. He knows how to pity and help those who are tempted, because he has been tempted himself. He knows what temptations mean, not only with that knowledge whereby he knows all things, but by experience. He well remembers what he endured in the wilderness, and in the garden; and though it is for his glory and our comfort that he suffered temptation without sin, yet for that very reason, and because he was perfectly holy, the temptations of Satan were unspeakably more bitter to him than they can be to us. The great duty and refuge of the tempted now is, to apply to him; and they have the highest encouragement to do so, in that they are assured he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. And for the like reason they find some consolation in applying to those of their brethren who have suffered the same things. None but these can either understand or pity their complaints. If the Lord has any children who are not exercised with spiritual temptations, I am sure they are but poorly qualified to "speak a word in season to those who are weary." In this

school you have acquired the tongue of the learned; and let it not seem a small thing to you, if the Lord has given you wisdom and ability to comfort the afflicted ones: if your prayers, your life, and the knowledge they have of your trials, affords them some relief in a dark hour, this is an honor and a privilege which, I am persuaded, you will think you have not purchased too dear, by all that you have endured.

Once more: Temptations, by giving us a painful sensibility of the weakness of our graces, and the strength of our inward corruptions, tend to mortify the evil principles of *self-dependence* and *self-righteousness*, which are so deeply rooted in our fallen nature; to make Christ, in all his relations, offices, and characters, more precious to us; and to convince us, that without him we can do nothing.

It would be easy to enlarge upon these and other advantages which the Lord enables his people to derive from the things which they suffer; so that they may say, with Samson, "Out of the eater comes forth meat;" and that, what their adversary designs for their overthrow, contributes to their establishment. But I have already exceeded my limits. Enough, I hope, has been said to prove, that **God has wise and gracious ends in permitting** them for a season to be tossed with tempest, and not comforted. Before long these designs will be more fully unfolded to us; and we shall be satisfied that he has done all things well. In the meanwhile it is our duty, and will be much for our comfort, to believe it upon the authority of his word.

2. I shall now proceed to offer some ADVICES to those who are tempted. But I am ready to say—To what purpose? When the enemy comes in like a flood; when the very foundations of hope are attacked; when suspicions are raised in the mind, not only

concerning an interest in the promises, but concerning the truth of the Scripture itself; when a dark cloud blots out, not only the sense, but almost the remembrance of past comforts; when the mind is overwhelmed with torrents of blasphemous, unclean, or monstrous imaginations, things horrible and unutterable; when *the fiery darts of Satan have set the corruptions of the heart in a flame*: at such a season a person is little disposed or able to listen to advice. I shall, however, mention some things by which, ordinarily, Satan maintains his advantage against them in these circumstances, that they may be upon their guard as much as possible. **Satan's principal devices are—**

1. To hide from a believer, *the Lord's designs* in permitting him thus to rage. Some of these I have noticed; and they should endeavor to keep them upon their minds. It is hard for them, during the violence of the storm, to conceive that any good can possibly arise from the experience of so much evil. But when the storm is over, they find that the Lord is still mindful of them. Now, though a young soldier may well be startled at the first onset in the field of battle, it seems possible that those who have been often engaged should at length gain confidence, from the recollection of the many instances in which they have formerly found, by the event, that the Lord was surely with them in the like difficulties, and that their fears were only groundless and imaginary. When the warfare is hottest, they have still reason to say, "Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him."

2. To make them utter impatient speeches, which do but aggravate their distress. It is said of Job, under his first trials, "In all this he sinned not with his lips, nor charged God foolishly." So long, Satan was unable to prevail. Afterwards he opened his mouth, as Jeremiah did likewise, and cursed the day of his birth. When he once began to complain, his causes of complaint increased. **We cannot prevent**

dreadful thoughts from arising in our hearts; but we should be cautious of giving them vent, by speaking unadvisedly. This is like letting in wind upon a smothering fire, which will make it burn more fiercely.

3. To persuade them that all they feel and tremble at arises immediately from their own hearts. Indeed it is a most awful proof of our depravity, that we feel something within ready to comply with the suggestions of the enemy, in defiance of our better judgment and desires. But it is not so in all cases. It is not always easy, nor is it needful, exactly to draw the line between the temptations of Satan and our own corruptions: but sometimes it is not impossible to distinguish them. When a child of God is prompted to blaspheme the name that he adores, or to commit such evils as even unsanctified nature would recoil at; the enemy has done it, and shall be answerable for the whole guilt. The soul in this case is passive, and suffers with extreme reluctance what it more dreads than the greatest evils which can affect the body. Nor do the deepest wounds of this kind leave a scar upon the conscience, when the storm is over; which is a proof that they are not our own act.

4. To drive them from the Throne of Grace. Prayer, which is at all times necessary, is especially so in a time of temptation. But how hard is it to come boldly, that we may obtain help in this time of need! but, however hard, it must be attempted. By discontinuing prayer, we give the enemy the greatest encouragement possible; for then he sees that his temptations have the effect which he intends by them, to intercept us from our stronghold. When our Lord was in an agony, he prayed the most earnestly: the ardor of his prayer increased with the distress of his soul. It would be happy if we could always imitate him in this; but too often temptations and difficulties, instead of rousing our application, dishearten and enfeeble us; so

that our cries are the faintest when we stand most in need of assistance. But so long as prayer is restrained, our burden is increased: Psalm 32:3, Psalm 32:5.

If Satan cannot make them omit praying, he will repeatedly endeavor to weary them by working upon the *legality* which cleaves so close to the heart. Satan is a hard task-master, when he interferes in the performance of our spiritual duties. This he does perhaps more frequently than we think of; for he can, if it serves his purpose, appear as an *angel of light*. When the soul is in a tempest, and attempts to pray, he will suggest, that prayer on these occasions should be protracted to such a length, and performed with such steadiness, as is found to be at that season quite impracticable. Such constrained efforts are wearisome; and from the manner of the performance, he takes occasion to fix fresh guilt upon the conscience. Short, frequent, and fervent petitions, which will almost necessarily arise from what is felt when temptation is violent, are best suited to the case; and we need not add to the burden, by tasking ourselves beyond our power, as if we expected to be heard for our much speaking. Blessed be God that we fight with an enemy already vanquished by our Lord, and that we have a sure promise of victory. The Lord is our banner.

A Christian Library

"Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body." Ecclesiastes 12:12

Dear Sir,

An eager desire of reading many books, though it is often supposed

to be the effect of a taste for knowledge, is perhaps a principal cause of detaining multitudes in ignorance and perplexity. When an inexperienced person thus ventures into the uncertain tide of opinions, he is liable to be hurried hither and thither with the changing stream; to fall in with every new proposal, and to be continually perplexed with the difficulty of distinguishing between probability and truth. Or if, at last, he happily finds a clue to lead him through the labyrinth wherein so many have been lost, he will acknowledge, upon a review, that from what he remembers to have read (for perhaps the greater part he has wholly forgotten), he has gained little more than a discovery of what mistakes, uncertainty, insignificance, acrimony, and presumption, are often obtruded on the world under the disguise of a plausible title-page.

It is far from my intention to depreciate the value or deny the usefulness of books, without exception. A few well-chosen treatises, carefully perused and thoroughly digested, will deserve and reward our pains; but a multiplicity of reading is seldom attended with a good effect. Besides the confusion it often brings upon the judgment and memory, it occasions a vast expense of time, indisposes for close thinking, and keeps us poor, in the midst of seeming plenty, by reducing us to live upon the thoughts of others, instead of laboring to improve and increase the stock of our own reflections.

Every branch of knowledge is attended with this inconvenience; but it is in no one more sensibly felt than when the inquiry is directed to the subject of religion. Perhaps no country has abounded so much with religious books as our own: many of them are truly excellent; but a very great number of those which are usually met with, as they stand recommended by great names, and the general taste of the public, are more likely to mislead an inquirer, than to direct him into the paths of true peace and wisdom.

And even in those books which are in the main agreeable to the word of God, there is often so great a mixture of human infirmity, so much of the spirit of controversy and party, such manifest defects in some, and so many unwarrantable additions to the simple truth of the Gospel in others, that, unless a person's judgment is already formed, or he has a prudent friend to direct his choice, he will be probably led into error or prejudice before he is aware, by his attachment to a favorite author.

Allowing, therefore, the advantage of a discreet and seasonable use of human writings, I would point out a still more excellent way for the acquisition of true knowledge: a method which, if wholly neglected, the utmost diligence in the use of every other means will prove ineffectual; but which, if faithfully pursued, in an humble dependence upon the Divine blessing, will not only of itself lead us by the straightest path to wisdom, but will also give a double efficacy to every subordinate assistance.

If I may be allowed to use the term "book" in a metaphorical sense, I may say, that the Most High God, in condescension to the weakness of our faculties, the brevity of our lives, and our many avocations, has comprised all the knowledge conducive to our real happiness in **four comprehensive volumes**. The first, which may be considered as the text, is cheap, portable, and compendious, so that hardly any person in our favored land, who is apprised of its worth, need be without it; and the other three, which are the best and fullest commentaries upon this, are always at hand for our perusal, and pressing upon our attention in every place and circumstance of our lives.

It will be easily apprehended, that by the first book or volume, I mean that perfect and infallible system of truth, **the BIBLE**. The

internal character of this book, arising from its comprehensiveness, simplicity, majesty, and authority, sufficiently prove, to every enlightened mind, that it is given by inspiration of God. They who are competent judges of this evidence, are no more disturbed by the suggestions of some men reputed wise, that it is of human composition, than if they were told that men had invented the sun and placed it in the sky. Its fullness speaks its Author. No case has yet occurred, or ever will, for which there is not a sufficient provision made in this invaluable treasury. Here we may seek (and we shall not seek in vain) wherewith to combat and vanquish every error, to illustrate and confirm every spiritual truth. Here are promises suited to every need, directions adapted to every doubt, which can possibly arise. Here is milk for babes, meat for strong men, medicines for the wounded, refreshment for the weary. The general history of all nations and ages, and the particular experience of each private believer, from the beginning to the end of time—are wonderfully comprised in this single volume; so that whoever reads and improves it aright, may discover his state, his progress, his temptations, his danger, and his duty—as distinctly and minutely marked out, as if the whole had been written for him alone. In this respect, as well as in many others, great is the mystery of godliness.

The **simplicity**, as well as the subject-matter, of the Bible, evinces its Divine original. Though it has depths sufficient to perplex and confound the proudest efforts of unsanctified reason, it does not, as to its general import, require an elevated genius to understand it, but is equally addressed to the level of every capacity. As its contents are of universal concern, they are proposed in such a manner as to engage and satisfy the inquiries of all; and the learned, with respect to their own personal interest, have no advantage above the ignorant. That it is in fact read by many who receive no instruction or benefit from it, is wholly owing to their inattention or vanity. This event may

rather excite grief, than wonder. The Bible teaches us to expect it. It forewarns us, that the natural man cannot receive the things of God; they can neither understand nor approve them. It points out to us the necessity of a heavenly teacher, the Holy Spirit, who has promised to guide those who seek him by prayer, into all necessary truth. Those who implore his assistance, find the seals opened, the veil taken away, and the way of salvation made plain before them.

The **language** of the Bible is likewise clothed with inimitable majesty and authority. God speaks in it, and reveals the glory of his perfections—his sovereignty, holiness, justice, goodness, and grace—in a manner worthy of himself, though at the same time admirably adapted to our weakness. The most labored efforts of human genius are flat and languid, in comparison with those parts of the Bible which are designed to give us due apprehensions of that God with whom we have to do. Where shall we find such instances of the true, the sublime, the great, the marvelous, the beautiful, the heart-stirring, as in the Holy Scriptures?

Again: the **effects** which it performs demonstrate it to be the word of God. With a powerful and penetrating energy, it alarms and pierces the conscience, discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart, convinces the most obstinate, and makes the most careless tremble. With equal authority and efficacy, it speaks peace to the troubled mind, heals the wounded spirit, and can impart a joy unspeakable and full of glory, in the midst of the deepest distress. It teaches, persuades, comforts, and reproveth, with an authority that can neither be disputed nor evaded; and often communicates more light, motives, and influence, by a single sentence, to a plain unlettered believer, than he could derive from the voluminous commentaries of the learned.

In a word, the Bible answers the character the Apostle gives it: "It is able to make us wise unto salvation; it is completely and alone sufficient to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good work." The doctrines, histories, prophecies, promises, precepts, exhortations, examples, and warnings, contained in the Bible, form a perfect WHOLE, a complete summary of the will of God concerning us, in which nothing is lacking, nothing is superfluous.

The second volume which deserves our study, is the book of **CREATION**. "The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship." Nor can we cast our eyes anywhere, without meeting innumerable proofs of his wisdom, power, goodness, and presence. God is revealed in the *least*, as well as in the *greatest* of his works. The sun and the glow-worm, the stars and each single blade of grass—are equally the effects of Divine power. The lines of this book, though very beautiful and expressive in themselves, are not immediately legible by fallen man. The works of creation may be compared to a beautiful, but unknown language—of which the Bible is the key; and without this key they cannot be understood. This book was always open to the heathens; but they could not read it, nor discern the proofs of his eternal power and Godhead which it affords. "They became vain in their own imaginations, and worshiped the creature more than the Creator."

The case is much the same at this day with many reputed wise, whose hearts are not subjected to the authority of the Bible. The study of the works of God, independent of his word, though dignified with the names of science and philosophy, is no better than an elaborate trifling and waste of time. It is to be feared none are more remote from the true knowledge of God, than many of those who value themselves most upon their supposed knowledge of his creatures. They may speak in general terms of his wisdom; but they

live without him in the world; and their philosophy cannot teach them either to love or serve, to fear or trust him.

Those who know God in his word, may find both pleasure and profit in tracing his wisdom in his works, if their inquiries are kept within due bounds, and in a proper subservience to things of greater importance; but comparatively few have leisure, capacity, or opportunity for these inquiries.

But the book of creation is designed for the instruction of all believers. If they are not qualified to be astronomers or anatomists, yet from a view of the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars, which he has created, they learn to conceive of his condescension, power, and faithfulness. Though they are unacquainted with the theory of light and colors, they can see in the rainbow a token of God's covenant love. Perhaps they have no idea of the magnitude or distance of the sun; but it reminds them of Jesus the Sun of Righteousness, the source of light and life to their souls.

The Lord has established a wonderful analogy between the natural and the spiritual world. This is a secret only known to those who fear him; but they contemplate it with pleasure; and almost every object they see, when they are in a right frame of mind, either leads their thoughts to Jesus, or tends to illustrate some scriptural truth or promise. This is the best method of studying the book of Nature; and for this purpose it is always open and plain to those who love the Bible, so that he who runs may read.

The book of **PROVIDENCE** is the third volume, by which those who fear the Lord are instructed. This likewise is inextricable and unintelligible to the wisest of men who are not governed by the word of God. But when the principles of Scripture are admitted and understood, they throw a pleasing light upon the study of Divine

Providence, and at the same time are confirmed and illustrated by it. What we read in the Bible, of the sovereignty, wisdom, power, omniscience, and omnipresence of God, of his over-ruling all events to the accomplishment of his counsels and the manifestation of his glory, of the care he maintains of his church and people, and of his attention to their prayers—is exemplified by the history of nations and families, and the daily occurrences of private life.

The believer receives hourly and indubitable proofs that the Lord reigns; that truly there is a God who judges the earth. Hence arises a solid confidence: he sees that his concerns are in safe hands; and he needs not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; while others live at an uncertainty, exposed to the impression of every new appearance, and, like a ship in a storm, without rudder or pilot, abandoned to the power of the winds and waves.

In the history of Joseph, and in the book of Esther, and indeed throughout the Bible, we have specimens of the wise unerring providence of God: what important consequences depend, under his management, upon the smallest events; and with what certainty seeming contingencies are directed to the outcome which he has appointed! By these authentic specimens we learn to judge of the whole; and with still greater advantage by the light of the New Testament, which shows us, that the administration of all power in heaven and earth is in the hands of Jesus. The government is upon his shoulders: the King of saints is King of nations, King of kings, and Lord of lords: not a sparrow falls to the ground, nor a hair from our heads, without his cognizance. And though his ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts; though his agency is veiled from the *eye of sense* by the intervention of second causes; yet faith perceives, acknowledges, admires, and trusts his management. This study, like the former, does not require superior natural

abilities, but is obvious to the weakest and lowest of his people, so far as their own duty and peace are concerned.

The fourth volume is the book of the **HEART**, or of **Human Nature**, comprehending the experience of what passes within our own breasts, and the observations we make upon the principles and conduct of others, compared with what we read in the word of God. The heart of man is deep; but all its principles and workings, in every possible situation, and the various ways in which it is affected by sin, by Satan, by worldly objects, and by grace—in solitude and in company, in prosperity and in affliction—are disclosed and unfolded in the Scripture. Many, who are proud of their knowledge of what they might be safely ignorant of, are utter strangers to themselves. Having no acquaintance with the Scripture, they have neither skill nor inclination to look into their own hearts, nor any certain criterion whereby to judge of the conduct of human life. But the Bible which teaches us to read this mysterious book, also shows us the source, nature, and tendency of our hopes, fears, desires, pursuits, and perplexities; the reasons why we cannot be happy in ourselves, and the vanity and insufficiency of everything around us to help us.

The rest and happiness proposed in the Gospel, is likewise found to be exactly suitable to the desires and necessities of the awakened heart. And the conduct of those who reject this salvation, as well as the gracious effects produced in those who receive it, prove to a demonstration, that the word of God is indeed a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

My limits will admit but of a few hints upon these extensive subjects. I shall only observe, that whoever is well read in these four books, is a wise person, how little whatever he may know of what the men of the world call *science*. On the other hand, though a man should be

master of the whole circle of classical, scientific, and philosophical knowledge, if he has no taste for the Bible, and has no ability to apply it to the works of creation and providence, and his own experience—he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. I have pointed out a treasure of more worth than all the volumes in the Vatican.

Thoughts on the Exercise of Social Prayer

Sir,

I account it a great mercy, that at this time, when iniquity so generally abounds, there is a number, I hope a growing number, whose eyes affect their hearts, and who are stirred up to unite in prayer for the spread of Gospel knowledge, and a blessing upon our sinful land. Meetings for social prayer are frequent in different parts of the kingdom, and among various denominations of Christians. As the Lord has promised, that, when he prepares the heart to pray, he will graciously incline his ear to hear, who can tell but he may yet be entreated for us, and avert the heavy and justly-deserved judgments which seem to hang over us?

It is much to be desired, that our hearts might be so affected with a sense of Divine things, and so closely engaged when we are worshipping God, that it might not be in the power of little circumstances to interrupt and perplex us, and to make us think the service wearisome, and the time which we employ in it tedious. But as our infirmities are many and great, and the enemy of our souls is watchful to discompose us, if care is not taken by those who lead in social prayer, the exercise which is approved by the judgment may become a burden, and an occasion of sin. Complaints of this kind are frequent, and might, perhaps, be easily rectified, if the people chiefly

concerned were spoken to in love. But as they are usually the last who hear of it, it may perhaps be of service to communicate a few remarks on a subject of such general concern.

The chief fault of some good prayers is, that they are **too long**. Not that I think we should pray by the clock, and limit ourselves precisely to a certain number of minutes; but it is better of the two, that the hearers should wish the prayer had been longer, than spend half or a considerable part of the time in wishing it was over. This is frequently owing to an unnecessary enlargement upon every circumstance which comes to mind, as well as to the repetition of the same things. If we have been copious in pleading for spiritual blessings, it may be best to be brief and summary in the article of intercession for others; or if the frame of our spirits, or the circumstances of affairs, lead us to be more large and particular in laying the cases of others before the Lord, respect should be had to this intention in the former part of the prayer.

There are, doubtless, seasons when the Lord is pleased to favor those who pray with a peculiar liberty; they speak because they feel; they have a wrestling spirit, and hardly know how to leave off. When this is the case, those who join with them are seldom wearied, though the prayer should be protracted something beyond the usual limits. But I believe it sometimes happens, both in praying and in preaching, that we are apt to spin out our time to the greatest length, when we have in reality the least to say. Long prayers should in general be avoided, especially where several people are to pray successively; or else even spiritual hearers will be unable to keep up their attention. And here I would just notice an impropriety we sometimes meet with, that, when a person gives expectation that he is just going to conclude his prayer, something not thought of in its proper place occurring that instant to his mind, leads him as it were to begin again. But, unless it

is a matter of singular importance, it would be better omitted for that time.

The prayers of some men are more like preaching than praying. They rather express the Lord's mind to the people, than the desires of the people to the Lord. Indeed this can hardly be called prayer. It might in another place stand for part of a good sermon; but will afford little help to those who desire to pray with their hearts. Prayer should be sententious, and made up of breathings to the Lord, either of confession, petition, or praise. It should be, not only scriptural and evangelical, but experimental—a simple and unstudied expression of the needs and feelings of the soul. It will be so if the heart is lively and affected in the duty; it must be so if the edification of others is the point in view.

Several books have been written to assist in the gift and exercise of prayer, as by Dr. Watts and others; and many useful hints may be borrowed from them; but a too close attention to the method and transitions therein recommended, gives an air of study and formality, and offends against that simplicity which is so essentially necessary to a good prayer, that no degree of acquired abilities can compensate for the lack of it. It is possible to learn to pray mechanically, and by rule; but it is hardly possible to do so with acceptance, and benefit to others. When the several parts of invocation, adoration, confession, petition, etc. follow each other in a stated order, the hearer's mind generally goes before the speaker's voice, and we can form a tolerable conjecture what is to come next. On this account we often find, that unlettered people, who have had little or no help from books, or rather have not been fettered by them, can pray with an unction and savor in an unpremeditated way; while the prayers of people of much superior abilities, perhaps even of ministers themselves, are, though accurate and regular, so dry and

starched, that they afford little either of pleasure or profit to a spiritual mind.

The spirit of prayer is the fruit and token of the Spirit of adoption. The studied addresses with which some approach the Throne of Grace, remind us of a stranger's coming to a great man's door; he knocks and waits, sends in his name, and goes through a course of ceremony, before he gains admittance; while a child of the family uses no ceremony at all, but enters freely when he pleases, because he knows he is at home. It is true, we ought always to draw near the Lord with great humiliation of spirit, and a sense of our unworthiness. But this spirit is not always best expressed or promoted by a pompous enumeration of the names and titles of the God with whom we have to do, or by fixing in our minds beforehand the exact order in which we propose to arrange the several parts of our prayer. Some attention to method may be proper, for the prevention of repetitions; and plain people may be a little defective in it sometimes; but this defect will not be half so tiresome and disagreeable as a studied and artificial exactness.

Many, perhaps most people who pray in public, have some favorite word or expression, which recurs too often in their prayers, and is frequently used as a mere expletive, having no necessary connection with the sense of what they are speaking. The most disagreeable of these is, when the name of the blessed God, with the addition of perhaps one or more epithets, as, Great, Glorious, Holy, Almighty, etc. is introduced so often, and without necessity, as seems neither to indicate a due reverence in the person who uses it, nor suited to excite reverence in those who hear. I will not say, that this is taking the name of God in vain, in the usual sense of the phrase: it is, however, a great impropriety, and should be guarded against. It would be well if those who use redundant expressions had a friend to

give them a caution, as they might with a little care be mended; and hardly any person can be sensible of the little peculiarities he may inadvertently adopt, unless he is told of it.

There are several things likewise respecting the voice and manner of prayer, which a person may with due care correct in himself, and which, if generally corrected, would make meetings for prayer more pleasant than they sometimes are. These I shall mention by pairs, as the happy and agreeable way is a medium between two inconvenient extremes.

Very loud speaking is a fault, when the size of the place, and the number of hearers, do not render it necessary. The end of speaking is to be heard; and, when that end is attained, a greater elevation of the voice is frequently hurtful to the speaker, and is more likely to confuse a hearer than to fix his attention. I do not deny but allowance must be made for constitution, and the warmth of the passions, which dispose some people to speak louder than others: yet such will do well to restrain themselves as much as they can. It may seem indeed to indicate great earnestness, and that the heart is much affected; yet it is often but false fire. It may be thought speaking with power; but a person who is favored with the Lord's presence may pray with power in a moderate voice; and there may be very little power of the Spirit, though the voice should be heard in the street and neighborhood.

The other extreme, of **speaking too low**, is not so frequent; but, if we are not heard, we might as well altogether hold our peace. It exhausts the spirits, and wearies the attention, to be listening for a length of time to a very low voice. Some words or sentences will be lost, which will render what is heard less intelligible and agreeable. If

the speaker can be heard by the person furthest distant from him, the rest will hear of course.

The **tone of the voice** is likewise to be regarded. Some have a tone in prayer, so very different from their usual way of speaking, that their nearest friends could hardly know them by their voice. Sometimes the tone is changed, perhaps more than once; so that, if our eyes did not give us more certain information than our ears, we might think two or three people had been speaking by turns. It is pity, that, when we approve what is spoken, we should be so easily disconcerted by an awkwardness of delivery; yet so it often is, and probably so it will be, in the present weak and imperfect state of human nature. It is more to be lamented than wondered at, that sincere Christians are sometimes forced to confess, "He is a good man, and his prayers, as to their substance, are spiritual and judicious; but there is something so displeasing in his manner, that I am always uneasy when I hear him."

Contrary to this, and still more offensive, is a custom that some have of talking to the Lord in prayer. It is their natural voice, indeed; but it is that expression of it which they use upon the most familiar and trivial occasions. The human voice is capable of so many inflections and variations, that it can adapt itself to the different sensations of our mind, as joy, sorrow, fear, desire, etc. If a man was pleading for his life, or expressing his thanks to the king for a pardon, common sense and decency would teach him a suitableness of manner; and anyone who could not understand his language, might know by the sound of his words that he was not making a bargain, or telling a story. How much more, when we speak to the King of kings, should the consideration of his glory, and our own vileness, and of the important concerns we are engaged in before him, impress us with an air of seriousness and reverence, and prevent us from speaking to

him as if he was altogether such a one as ourselves? The liberty to which we are called by the Gospel, does not at all encourage such a pertness and familiarity as would be unbecoming to use towards a fellow-worm who was a little advanced above us in worldly dignity.

I shall be glad if these hints may be of any service to those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth, and who wish that whatever has a tendency to dampen the spirit of devotion, either in themselves or in others, might be avoided. It is a point of delicacy and difficulty to tell anyone what we wish could be altered in his manner of prayer: but it can give no just offense to ask a friend, if he has read a letter on this subject, in "A Collection of Twenty-six Letters," published in 1775.

On the Gradual Increase of Gospel Illumination

Dear Sir,

The day is now breaking: how beautiful its appearance! how welcome the expectation of the approaching sun! It is this thought makes the dawn agreeable, that it is the presage of a brighter light; otherwise, if we expect no more day than it is this minute, we should rather complain of darkness, than rejoice in the early beauties of the morning. Thus the life of grace is the dawn of immortality: beautiful beyond expression, if compared with the night and thick darkness which formerly covered us; yet faint, indistinct, and unsatisfying, in comparison of the glory which shall be revealed.

It is, however, a sure pledge: so surely as we now see the light of the Sun of Righteousness, so surely shall we see the Sun himself, Jesus

the Lord, in all his glory and luster. In the mean time, we have reason to be thankful for a measure of light to walk and work by, and sufficient to show us the pits and snares by which we might be endangered: and we have a promise, that our present light shall grow stronger and stronger, if we are diligent in the use of the appointed means, until the messenger of Jesus shall lead us within the veil, and then farewell shades and obscurity for ever.

I can now almost see to write, and shall soon put the extinguisher over my candle: I do this without the least reluctance, when I enjoy a better light; but I should have been unwilling half an hour ago. Just thus, methinks, when the light of the glorious Gospel shines into the heart, all our former feeble lights, our apprehensions, and our contrivances, become at once unnecessary and unnoticed. How cheerfully did the Apostle put out the candle of his own righteousness, attainments, and diligence, when the true Sun arose upon him! Phi. 3:7-8. Your last letter is as a comment upon his determination. Adored be the grace that has given us to be like-minded, even to "account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord."

While I am writing, a new luster, which gilds the house on the hill opposite to my study window, informs me that the sun is now rising; he is rising to others, but not yet to me; my situation is lower, so that they enjoy a few gleams of sunshine before me: yet this momentary difference is inconsiderable, when compared to the duration of a whole day. Thus some are called by grace earlier in life, and some later; but the seeming difference will be lost and vanish when the great day of eternity comes on. There is a time, the Lord's best appointed time, when he will arise and shine upon many a soul that now sits "in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death."

I have been thinking on the Lord's conference with Nicodemus; it is a copious subject, and affords room, in one part or other, for the whole round of doctrinal and experimental topics. Nicodemus is an encouraging example to those who are seeking the Lord's salvation: he had received some favorable impressions of Jesus; but he was very ignorant, and much under the fear of man. He dared only come by night; and at first, though he heard, he understood not: but He, who opens the eyes of the blind, brought him surely, though gently, forward. The next time we hear of him, he dared put in a word in behalf of Christ, even in the midst of his enemies, John 7:50-53; and at last, he had the courage openly and publicly to assist in preparing the body of his Master for its funeral, at a time when our Lord's more avowed followers had all forsook him, and fled. So true is that, "Then you shall know, if you follow on to know the Lord;" and again, "He gives power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increases strength."

Hope then, my soul, against hope; though your graces are faint and languid, he who planted them will water his own work, and not allow them wholly to die. He can make a little one as a thousand; at his presence mountains sink into plains, streams gush out of the flinty rock, and the wilderness blossoms as the rose. He can pull down what sin builds up, and build up what sin pulls down; that which was impossible to us, is easy to him; and he has bid us expect seasons of refreshment from His presence. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

To a Friend, on his Recovery from Illness

Dear Sir,

I suppose you will receive many congratulations on your recovery from your late dangerous illness; most of them perhaps more sprightly and better turned, but none, I persuade myself, more sincere and affectionate than mine. I beg you would prepare yourself by this good opinion of me, before you read further; and let the reality of my regard excuse what you may dislike in my manner of expressing it.

When a person is returned from a doubtful distant voyage, we are naturally led to inquire into the incidents he has met with, and the discoveries he has made. Indulge me in a curiosity of this kind, especially as my affection gives me an interest and concern in the event. You have been, my friend, upon the brink, the very edge, of an eternal state; but God has restored you back to the world again. Did you meet with, or have you brought back, nothing new? Did nothing occur to stop or turn your usual train of thought? Were your apprehensions of invisible things exactly the same in the height of your sickness, when you were cut off from the world and all its engagements—as when you were in perfect health, and in the highest enjoyment of your own inclinations?

If you answer me, "Yes, all things are just the same as formerly, the difference between sickness and health only excepted;" I am at a loss how to reply. I can only sigh and wonder; sigh, that it should be thus with any, that it should be thus with you whom I dearly love; and wonder, since this unhappy case, strange as it seems in one view, is yet so frequent, why it not was always thus with myself; for long and often it was just so. Many a time, when sickness had brought me, as

we say, to death's door, I was as easy and insensible as the sailor, who, in the height of a storm, would presume to sleep upon the top of the mast, quite regardless that the next tossing wave might plunge him into the raging ocean, beyond all possibility of relief. But at length a day came, which, though the most terrible day I ever saw, I can now look back upon with thankfulness and pleasure: I say, the time came, when, in such a helpless extremity, and under the expectation of immediate death, it pleased God to remove the veil from my eyes, and I saw things in some measure as they really were.

Imagine with yourself, a person trembling upon the brink of a dreadful precipice; with a powerful and inexorable enemy eager to push him down, and an assemblage of all that is horrible waiting at the bottom for his fall. Even this will give you but a faint representation of the state of my mind at that time. Believe me, it was not a whim or a dream, which changed my sentiments and conduct—but a powerful conviction, which will not admit the least doubt; an evidence which, like that I have of my own existence, I cannot call in question without contradicting all my senses. And though my case was in some respects uncommon, yet something like it is known by one and another every day: and I have myself conversed with many, who, after a course of years spent in defending Deistical principles, or indulging libertine practices, when they have thought themselves confirmed in their schemes by the cool assent of what they then deemed *impartial reason*, have been like me brought to glory in the cross of Christ, and to live by that faith which they had before slighted and opposed.

By these instances, I know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. The same power which humbled me, can undoubtedly bring down the most haughty infidel upon earth. And as I likewise knew, that, to show his power, he is often pleased to make use of weak instruments,

I am encouraged, notwithstanding the apparent difficulty of succeeding, to warn those over whom friendship or affection gives me any influence, of the evil and the danger of a course of life formed upon the prevailing maxims of the world. So far as I neglect this, I am unfaithful in my professions both to God and man.

I shall not at present trouble you in an argumentative way. If by dint of reasoning I could effect some change in your notions, my arguments, unless applied by a Superior Power, would still leave your heart unchanged and untouched. *A man may give his assent to the Gospel, and be able to defend it against others, and yet not have his own spirit truly influenced by it.* This thought I shall leave with you, that if your philosophy be not true to a demonstration, it must necessarily be false; for the outcome is too important to make a doubt on the dangerous side tolerable. If the Christian could possibly be mistaken, he is still upon equal terms with those who pronounce him to be so; but if the Deist be wrong (that is, if we Christians are in the right), the consequence to him must be unavoidable and intolerable. This, you will say, is a trite argument: I own it; but, beaten as it is, it will never be worn out or answered.

Permit me to remind you, that the points in debate between us are already settled in themselves, and that our talking cannot alter or affect the nature of things; for they will be as they are, whatever apprehensions we may form of them: and remember likewise, that we must all, each one for himself, experience on which side the truth lies. I used a wrong word when I spoke of your *recovery*; my dear friend, look upon it only as a *reprieve*; for you carry the sentence of death about with you still; and unless you should be cut off (which God of his mercy forbid!) by a sudden stroke, you will as surely lie upon a death-bed; as you have been now raised from a bed of sickness. And remember likewise (how can I bear to write it!) that,

should you neglect my admonitions, they will, notwithstanding, have an effect upon you, though not such an effect as I could wish: they will render you more inexcusable.

I have delivered my own soul by faithfully warning you: but if you will not examine the matter with that seriousness it calls for; if you will not look up to God, the Creator of your body, and the Preserver of your spirit, for direction and assistance how to please him; if you will have your reading and conversation only on one side of the question; if you determine to let afflictions and dangers, mercies and deliverances, all pass without reflection and improvement; if you will spend your life as though you thought you were sent into the world only to eat, sleep, and play, and, after a course of years, be extinguished like the snuff of a candle; why, then, you must abide the consequences. But assuredly, sooner or later, God will meet you. My hearty daily prayer is, that it may be in a way of mercy, and that you may be added to the number of the trophies of his invincible grace.

Communion with God

Dear Sir,

Though many authors have written largely and well concerning communion with God, I shall not refer you to books, or have recourse to them myself; but, in compliance with your request, shall simply offer you what occurs to my thoughts upon the subject. I propose not to exceed the limits of a sheet of paper, and must therefore come immediately to the point.

That God is to be worshiped, is generally acknowledged; but those who worship him in spirit and in truth, have real fellowship and

communion with him, is known only to themselves. The world can neither understand nor believe it. Many, who would not be thought to have cast off all reverence for the Scripture, and therefore do not choose flatly to contradict the Apostle's testimony, 1Jo. 1:3, attempt to evade its force by restraining it to the primitive times. They will allow that it might be so then; but they pretend that circumstances with us are greatly altered. Circumstances are, indeed, altered with us, so far, that men may now pass for Christians who confess and manifest themselves strangers to the Spirit of Christ: but who can believe that the very nature and design of Christianity should alter in the course of time? and that communion with God, which was essential to it in the Apostles' days, should be now so unnecessary and is practicable as to expose all who profess an acquaintance with it to the charge of enthusiasm and folly? However, those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, will not be disputed out of their spiritual senses. If they are competent judges whether they ever saw the light, or felt the beams of the sun, they are no less certain that, by the knowledge of the Gospel, they are brought into a state of communion with God.

Communion with God presupposes union with God. By nature we are strangers, yes, enemies to God; but we are reconciled, brought near, and become his children, by faith in Christ Jesus. We can have no true knowledge of God, desire towards him, access unto him, or gracious communications from him, but in and through the Son of his love. He is the medium of this inestimable privilege: for he is the way, the only way, of fellowship between heaven and earth; the sinner's way to God, and God's way of mercy to the sinner. If any pretends to know God, and to have communion with him, otherwise than by the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whom he has sent, and by faith in his name, it is a proof that they neither know God nor themselves. God, if considered abstracted from the revelation of

himself in the person of Jesus, is a consuming fire; and if he should look upon us without respect to his covenant of mercy established in the Mediator, we could expect nothing from him but indignation and wrath. But when his Holy Spirit enables us to receive the record which he has given of his Son, we are delivered and secured from condemnation; we are accepted in the Beloved; we are united to him in whom all the fullness of the Godhead substantially dwells, and all the riches of Divine wisdom, power, and love, are treasured up.

Thus in him, as the temple wherein the glory of God is manifested, and by him, as the representative and high priest of his people, and through him, as the living head of his mystical body the church, believers maintain communion with God. They have food to eat which the world knows not of, honor which comes of God alone, joy which a stranger intermeddles not with. They are, for the most part, poor and afflicted, frequently scorned and reproached, accounted hypocrites or visionaries, knaves or fools; but this one thing makes amends for all, "They have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

I would observe further, that as the incarnation of that Mighty One, on whom our help is laid, was necessary, that a perfect obedience to the law, and a complete and proper atonement for sin, might be accomplished in the human nature that had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; so, in another view, it affords us unspeakable advantage for our comfortable and intimate communion with God by him. The adorable and solemn perfections of Deity are softened, if I may so speak, and rendered more familiar and engaging to our apprehensions, when we consider them as resident in him, who is very bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and who, having by himself purged our sins, is now seated on the right hand of the

Majesty on high, and reigns, in the nature of man, over all, God blessed forever.

Thus he who knows our frame, by becoming man like ourselves, is the supreme and ultimate object of that philanthropy, that human affection, which he originally implanted in us. He has made us susceptible of the endearments of friendship and relative life: and he admits us to communion with himself under the most engaging characters and relations, as our Friend, our Brother, and our Husband. Those who, by that faith which is of the operation of God, are thus united to him in Christ, are brought thereby into a state of real habitual communion with him. The degree of its exercise and sensible perception on our parts, is various in different people, and in the same person at different times; for it depends upon the communications we receive from the Lord the Spirit, who distributes them to each one, just as he determines, adjusting his dispensations with a wise and merciful respect to our present state of discipline.

If we were wholly freed from the effects of a depraved nature, the snares of an evil world, and the subtle temptations of Satan--our actual communion with God would be always lively, sensible, and fervent. It will be thus in heaven; there its exercise will be without obstruction, abatement, or interruption. But so long as we are liable to spiritual pride, indolence, an undue attachment to worldly things, and irregular distempered passions, the Lord is pleased to give, increase, suspend, or renew, the sensible impressions of his love and grace, in such seasons and measures as he sees most suitable to prevent or control these evils--or to humble us for them. We grieve his Spirit, and he withdraws; but, by his secret power over our hearts, he makes us sensible of our folly and loss, teaches us to mourn after him, and to entreat his return. These desires, which are

the effects of his own grace, he answers in his own time, and shines forth upon the soul with healing in his beams.

But, such is our weakness, and so unapt are we to retain even those lessons which we have learned by painful experience, that we are prone to repeat our former miscarriages, and to render a repetition of the same changes necessary. From hence it is that what we call our frames are so very variable, and that our comfortable sense of Divine communion is rather transient than abiding. But the communion itself, upon which the life and safety of our souls depend, is never totally obstructed; nor can it be, unless God should be unmindful of his covenant, and forsake the work of his own hands. And when it is not perceptible to sense, it may ordinarily be made evident to faith, by duly comparing what we read in the Scripture with what passes in our hearts. I say ordinarily, because there may be some excepted cases. If a believer is unhappily brought under the power of some known sin, or has grievously and notoriously declined from his profession, it is possible that the Lord may hide himself behind so dark a cloud, and leave him for a while to such hardness of heart, as that he shall seem to himself to be utterly destitute and forsaken. And the like apprehensions may be formed under some of Satan's violent temptations, when he is permitted to come in as a flood, and to overpower the apparent exercise of every grace by a torrent of blasphemous and evil imaginations. Yet the Lord is still present with his people in the darkest hours, or the unavoidable event of such cases would be apostasy or despair. Psalm 41:11.

The communion we speak of comprises a mutual fellowship and communication in love, in counsels, and in interests.

In **LOVE**. The Lord, by his Spirit, manifests and confirms his love to his people. For this purpose he meets them at his throne of grace,

and in his ordinances. There he makes himself known unto them, as he does not unto the world; causes his goodness to pass before them; opens, applies, and seals to them, his exceeding great and precious promises; and gives them the Spirit of adoption, whereby, unworthy as they are, they are enabled to cry "Abba, Father." He causes them to understand that great love with which he has loved them, in redeeming them by price and by power, washing them from their sins in the blood of the Lamb, recovering them from the dominion of Satan, and preparing for them an everlasting kingdom, where they shall see his face, and rejoice in his glory.

The knowledge of his love to them, produces a return of love from them to him. They adore him, and admire him; they make an unreserved surrender of their hearts to him. They view him and delight in him, as their God, their Savior, and their portion. They account his favor better than life. He is the sun of their souls: if he is pleased to shine upon them, all is well, and they are not greatly anxious about other things; but if he hides his face, the smiles of the whole creation can afford them no solid comfort. They esteem one day or hour spent in the delightful contemplation of his glorious excellencies, and in the expression of their desires towards him, better than a thousand. And when their love is most fervent, they are ashamed that it is so faint, and chide and bemoan themselves that they can love him no more. This often makes them long to depart, willing to leave their dearest earthly comforts, that they may see him as he is, without a veil or cloud: for they know that then, and not until then, they shall love him as they ought.

In **COUNSELS**. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him. He deals familiarly with them. He calls them not servants only, but friends; and he treats them as friends. He affords them more than promises; for he opens to them the plan of his great designs from

everlasting to everlasting; shows them the strong foundations and inviolable securities of his favor towards them, the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of his love, which passes knowledge, and the unsearchable riches of his grace. He instructs them in the mysterious conduct of his providence, the reasons and ends of all his dispensations in which they are concerned; and solves a thousand hard questions to their satisfaction, which are inexplicable to the natural wisdom of man. He teaches them likewise the beauty of his precepts, the path of their duty, and the nature of their warfare. He acquaints them with the plots of their enemies, the snares and dangers they are exposed to, and the best methods of avoiding them. And he permits and enables them to acquaint him with all their cares, fears, needs, and troubles, with more freedom than they can unbosom themselves to their nearest earthly friends. His ear is always open to them; he is never weary of hearing their petitions, and answering their petitions.

The men of the world would account it a high honor and privilege to have an unrestrained liberty of access to an earthly king; but what words can express the privilege and honor of believers, who, whenever they please, have audience of the King of kings, whose compassion, mercy, and power are, like his majesty, infinite? The world wonders at their indifference to the vain pursuits and amusements by which others are engrossed; that they are so patient in trouble, so inflexible in their conduct, so well satisfied with that state of poverty and obscurity which the Lord, for the most part, allots them; but the wonder would cease, if what passes in secret were publicly known. They have obtained the Pearl of great price; they have communion with God; they derive their wisdom, strength, and comfort from on high; and cast all their cares upon him, who, they assuredly know, vouchsafes to take care of them. This reminds me of another branch of their communion, namely.

In **INTERESTS**. The Lord claims them for his portion; he accounts them his jewels; and their happiness in time and eternity is the great end which, next to his own glory, and in inseparable connection with it, he has immediately and invariably in view. In this point all his dispensations of grace and providence shall finally terminate. He himself is their guide and their guard: he keeps them as the apple of his eye; the hairs of their head are numbered; and not an event in their lives takes place but in an appointed subserviency to their final good. And as he is pleased to espouse their interests, they, through grace, are devoted to his interests. They are no longer their own; they would not be their own; it is their desire, their joy, their glory, to live to him who died for them. He has won their hearts by his love, and made them a willing people in the day of his power.

The glory of his name, the success of his cause, the prosperity of his people, the accomplishment of his will—these are the great and leading objects which are engraved upon their hearts, and to which all their prayers, desires, and endeavors are directed. They would count nothing dear, not even their lives, if set in competition with these. In the midst of their afflictions, if the Lord is glorified, if sinners are converted, if the church flourishes--they can rejoice. But when iniquity abounds, when love waxes cold, when professors depart from the doctrines of truth and the power of godliness--then they are grieved and pained to the heart; then they are touched in what they account their nearest interest, because it is their Lord's.

This is the spirit of a true Christian. May the Lord increase it in us, and in all who love his name! I have room only to subscribe myself.

A Word in Season

Dear Sir,

In this dark and declining day, when iniquity abounds, the awful tokens of God's displeasure are multiplying around us, and too many professors, not duly sensible of the real cause of all the evils we either feel, or have reason to fear, are disputing, instead of praying; may the Lord bestow upon you and I, and upon all who fear his name, a spirit suited to the times! that the words of David, "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved," may express the very sensation and frame of our hearts. Permit me to keep this expression in my view while I write, though it may perhaps give my letter something of the air of a sermon.

The Hebrew word answering to "I was grieved," signifies such a kind of grief as is mixed with dislike; such a grief as a believer must feel when he has a sense of his own corruptions. It is frequently rendered, as in Eze. 20:43, to loathe: "you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight." We are not required strictly to hate ourselves, but the evil that is in us. So, *when we look at the ungodly, we are not to hate them—but to pity them, mourn over them, and pray for them. Nor have we any right to boast over them; for, by nature, and of ourselves, we are no better than they.*

But their sinfulness should cause a dislike, an holy indignation: as it is recorded of our Lord, who, though full of compassion and tenderness, so that he wept over his enemies, and prayed for his actual murderers, yet looked upon transgressors with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts. A feeling of this kind seems essential to that new nature which characterizes the children of God; and where it is not in habitual exercise, it is a sufficient evidence that the soul, if truly alive to God at all, is at least in lean and distempered state. Who can avoid being grieved and hurt by that which is in direct opposition to what he most loves? Believers love holiness; and,

unless when stupefied by the arts of Satan, can hardly bear themselves for what they find contrary to it within their own breasts; and must, therefore, of course, be grieved with the sins of others. Like righteous Lot, and from his principles, they are vexed with the filthy lives of the wicked. Can those who reverence the name of God be easy and unconcerned when they hear it blasphemed? No! their ears are wounded, and their hearts are pained. Can those who are followers of peace and purity, behold unmoved the riots, licentiousness, and daring wickedness of those who have cast off both shame and fear? Can those who have affections of mercy and compassion, be unaffected when they see the iron hand of oppression grinding the faces of the poor? Or can any who love the songs of Zion, help being shocked with the songs of drunkards? I trust there are many, who, upon these accounts, are daily crying, "My soul is among lions! Woe is me that I dwell in Mesech? O gather not my soul with sinners." **The thought of being shut up forever with the ungodly, would be terrible as hell to a gracious soul, though there were no devouring fire, no keen sense of the wrath of God, to be feared.**

They are grieved likewise upon their Lord's account; for they have obtained a spark of zeal for his honor and glory. With Elijah, they are "very jealous for the Lord Almighty." They feel their obligations to him, and know he well deserves to reign in every heart. But when, on the contrary, they see almost everyone in a conspiracy against him, despising him to his face, trampling upon his laws, rejecting his authority, and abusing his patience; their eyes affect their hearts. What man of sensibility could brook to see everyone about him contriving how to affront and injure the person whom he most loved? Now the Lord is the believer's best friend, the beloved of his soul; and therefore he is grieved and troubled when he "beholds the transgressors."

This emotion is likewise heightened by compassion to souls. Grace gives some view of the evil of sin, the dreadfulness of the wrath of God, and the vast importance of that word eternity. Thus instructed in the sanctuary of God, they would be stocks and stones, were they capable of beholding sinners rushing upon destruction without being grieved for them. But they cannot bear it. They cannot but give and repeat a faithful warning, though they have little reason to expect any better return than scorn and ill-treatment, for what the world accounts an impertinent officiousness.

But who then are believers! Who are thus "on the Lord's side?"—if these sentiments are common to all who are born of God? Must we un-Christian perhaps the greater part of professors at this time? for it is too evident, that many, who bear the name of Gospel professors, discover but little of this concern. In general, I think, this subject affords no improper test for the trial of our spirits. The effects of grace in similar circumstances are uniform; but if any, who think themselves possessors of it, feel no grief for the aboundings of sin, and the obstinacy of sinners, they differ from the saints recorded both in the Old and New Testament; and it will be their wisdom to examine and take heed lest they be deceived. It is easy to call Christ, 'Lord, Lord'; but a criminal lukewarmness of spirit, where his cause, honor, and Gospel are in question, will one day meet with an awful rebuke, and be treated, in those who make mention of his name, as high treason against his person and government.

But if we allow, that, through the contagion of the times, and the power of Satan, it is possible for true Christians to sink into this indifference, and for the wise virgins, as well as the foolish virgins to sleep, when they should be watching unto prayer; even these have much to fear, lest they should largely participate in the sufferings which the provocation's they connive at have a direct tendency to

bring upon a sinful people. When national sins draw down national judgments, the Lord has given us a hope, that he will fix a mark of protection upon those who sigh and mourn in secret before him for the evils which they are unable to prevent. To these he will be a sanctuary; he will either preserve them unhurt, in the midst of surrounding calamities, or he will support them with consolations superior to all their troubles, when the hearts of others are shaken like leaves in a storm. But none have reason to expect to be thus privileged, who have not a heart given them to lament their own sins, and the sins of those among whom they live.

Surely the Lord has a controversy with this land; and there can hardly a period be assigned in the annals of ages, when it was more expedient, or seasonable, for those who fear him to stir up each other to humiliation and prayer, than at present. What is commonly called our national debt, is swelled to an enormous greatness. It may be quickly expressed in figures; but a person must be well-versed in calculation, to form a tolerable idea of accumulated millions. But what arithmetic is sufficient to compute the immensity of our national debt in a spiritual sense? or, in other words, the amount of our national sins? The spirit of infidelity, which for a time distinguished, comparatively, a few, and, like a river, was restrained within narrow bounds—has of late years broken down its banks, and deluged the land. This wide-spreading evil has, in innumerable instances, as might be expected, emboldened the natural heart against the fear of God, hardened it to an insensibility of moral obligation, and strengthened its prejudices against the Gospel. The consequence has been, that profligate wickedness has become almost as universal as the air we breathe; and is practiced with little more reserve or secrecy than the transactions of common business, except in such instances as would subject the offender to the penalty of human laws. O the unspeakable patience of God! The multiplied

instances of impiety, blasphemy, cruelty, adultery, and abominations not to be thought of without horror, under which this land groans, are only known to him who knows all things.

There are few sins which imply greater contempt of God, or a more obdurate state of mind in the offender, than perjury; yet the guilt of it is so little regarded, and temptations to it so very frequent, that perhaps I do not go too far in supposing, there are more deliberate acts of perjury committed among us, than among all the rest of mankind taken together. Though some of the Roman poets and historians have given very dark pictures of the times they lived in, their worst descriptions of this kind would hardly be found exaggerated, if applied to our own. But what are the sins of Heathens, if compared with the like evils perpetrated in a land bearing the name of Christian, favored with the word of God, the light of the Gospel, and enjoying the blessings of civil and religious liberty and peace, in a higher degree, and for a longer continuance, than was afforded to any people of whose history we have heard?

The state of the churches of Christ at this time affords likewise ample cause for humiliation and grief. The formality, conformity to the world, the lack of Christian love, the intemperate and unprofitable contentions, which prevail among us, show how faintly the power of the Gospel is felt, even by many who profess to have embraced it. The true and undefiled doctrine of Jesus is not only opposed by its declared enemies, but wounded and dishonored in the house of its friends. And though the sins of those who avow subjection to the institutions of Christ, may not have so gross a stamp of profligacy and immorality, as of those who set him openly at defiance; yet they have, in some respects, an aggravation, of which the others are not capable; as being committed against clearer light, and peculiar, acknowledged obligations. From the consideration of both taken

together, who, that has a spark of seriousness and attention, and that has learned from Scripture and history the sure connection between *sin* and *trouble*, can forbear trembling at that alarming question, so often proposed to the consciences of ungrateful Israel of old, "Shall not I visit you for these things? says the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" especially when we see the dispensations of God's providence so awfully corresponding with the threatenings in his word.

How much is it to be desired, then, that all who truly fear the Lord, instead of wasting their time in useless squabbles, may unite in earnest prayer; and, with deep remorse of heart, bemoan those evils which, unless repented of and forsaken, may bring upon us, as a people, such distress as neither we nor our fathers have known! If he is pleased thus to give us a heart to seek him, he will yet be found of us: but if, when his hand is lifted up, we cannot or will not see, nor regard the signs of the times—there is great reason to fear that our case is deplorable indeed.

A few, however, there will be, who will lay these things suitably to heart; and whom the Lord will favor and spare, as a man spares his only son who serves him. That you and I may be of this happy number, is my sincere prayer.

The City was Pure Gold

April, 1770

My friend,

Glorious things are spoken of the *city of God*, or (as I suppose) the *state of glory*, in Rev. 21:10 onwards. The description is doubtless

mystical, and perhaps nothing short of a happy experience and participation, will furnish an adequate exposition. One expression, in particular, has I believe puzzled wiser heads than mine to explain: "The street of **the city was pure gold**, as it were transparent glass." The construction likewise in the Greek is difficult. Some render it, pure gold, as transparent as glass. If our reading is right, we must understand it either of gold, pure, bright, and perspicuous as the finest transparent glass (for all glass is not transparent); or else as two distinct comparisons —as splendid and durable as the purest gold, as clear and transparent as the finest glass.

In that happy world, the beauties and advantages which here are divided and incompatible, will unite and agree. Our *glass* is clear—but brittle; our *gold* is shining and solid—but it is opaque, and reveals only a surface. And thus it is with our minds. The powers of the imagination are lively and extensive—but transient and uncertain; the powers of the understanding are more solid and regular—but at the same time more slow and limited, and confined to the outside properties of the few objects around us. But when we arrive within the veil, the perfections of the *glass* and the *gold* will be combined, and the imperfections of each will entirely cease. Then we shall *know* more than we can now *imagine!* The glass will be all gold. And then we shall apprehend Truth in its relations and consequences; not (as at present) by that tedious and fallible process which we call Reasoning—but by a single glance of thought, as the sight pierces in an instant through the largest transparent body. The gold will be all glass.

I do not offer this as the sense of the passage—but as a thought which once occurred to me while reading it. I daily groan under a desultory, ungovernable imagination, and a palpable darkness of understanding, which greatly impede me in my attempts to

contemplate the truths of God. Perhaps these complaints, in a greater or less degree, are common to all our fallen race, and exhibit mournful proofs that our nature is essentially depraved. The grace of God affords some assistance for correcting the wildness of the *imagination*, and enlarging the capacity of the *mind*; yet the cure at present is but palliative; but before long it shall be *perfect*, and our complaints shall cease forever. Now it costs us much pains to acquire a pittance of solid and useful knowledge; and the ideas we have collected are far from being at the disposal of judgment, and, like men in a crowd, are perpetually clashing and interfering with each other. But it will not be so, when we are completely freed from the *effects of sin*. *Confusion* and *darkness* will not follow us into the world where light and order reign. Then, and not until then, our knowledge will be perfect, and our possession of it uninterrupted and secure.

Since the radical powers of the soul are thus enfeebled and disordered, it is not to be wondered at that the best of men, and under their highest attainments, have found cause to make the acknowledgment of the Apostle, "When I would do good—evil is present with me!" But, blessed be God, though we must feel hourly cause for shame and humiliation for what we are in ourselves; we have cause to rejoice continually in Christ Jesus, who, as he is revealed unto us under the various names, characters, relations, and offices, which he bears in the Scripture, holds out to our faith a *balm* for every wound, a *cordial* for every discouragement, and a sufficient *answer* to every objection which sin or Satan can suggest against our peace. If we are guilty—He is our Righteousness; if we are sick—He is our infallible Physician; if we are weak, helpless, and defenseless—He is the compassionate and faithful Shepherd who has taken charge of us, and will not allow anything to disappoint our hopes of heaven, or to separate us from his love. He knows our frame, he remembers

that we are but dust, and has engaged to *guide* us by his counsel, *support* us by his power, and at length to *receive* us to his glory—that we may be with him forever!

A Word to Professors in Trade

Dear Sir,

It is suspected (or, rather, it is too certainly known), that, among those who are deemed Gospel professors, there are some people who allow themselves in the practice of dealing in prohibited, smuggled goods, to the injury of the public revenue, and the detriment of the fair trader. The decisions of the word of God, upon this point, are so plain and determinate, that it is rather difficult to conceive how a sincere mind can either overlook or mistake them. The same authority which forbids us to commit adultery or murder, requires us to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." "Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue." These precepts enjoin no more than what the common sense of mankind pronounces to be due, from subjects and members of society, to the governments they live under, and by which they are protected.

But the obligation is greatly enforced upon those who acknowledge themselves the disciples of Christ, since he has been pleased to make their compliance herein a part of the obedience they owe to himself. And it is plain, that these injunctions are universal and binding, under all civil governments, as such; for none can justly suppose, that tributes exacted by the Roman emperors (under whose dominion the first Christians lived), such as Tiberius or Nero, had

the sanction of our Lord and his apostles on account of their peculiar equity.

The vending of smuggled goods, or the buying them, if known to be so, is likewise injurious to the fair trader, who, conscientiously paying the prescribed taxes, cannot afford to sell so cheap as the smuggler, and therefore must expect the fewer customers. In this view, it offends the royal law of "doing to others as we desire that they should do unto us." The force of this argument may be easily felt, by anyone who will honestly make the case his own. Without any fancy reasoning, people may know in a moment that they would not like to be put to this disadvantage. It is therefore unjust (that is sinful, and utterly unfitting a professor of religion) to purchase smuggled goods, even in small quantities, and for family use.

As for those who, being in trade themselves, make this practice a branch of their business, and, under the semblance of a fair reputation, are doing things in secret which they would tremble to have discovered, being afraid of the tax collector, though not of God; I can only pray, that God may give them repentance: for it is a work of darkness, and needs it. Transactions of this kind cannot be carried on for a course of time, without such a series and complication of fraud and baseness, and for the most part of perjury likewise, as would be scandalous, not only in a professed Christian, but in an avowed infidel.

It should be observed likewise, that there is hardly any set of men more lost to society, or in a situation more dangerous to themselves and others, than the people who are called smugglers. Frequent fighting, and sometimes murder itself, are the consequence of their illicit commerce. Their money is ill gotten, and it is generally ill spent. They are greatly to be *pitied*. The employment they are

accustomed to, has a direct tendency to deprive them of character and the privileges of social life, and to harden their hearts and stupefy their consciences in the ways of sin. But for whom are they risking their lives and ruining their souls? I would hope, Reader, not for you, if you account yourself a Christian. If you, for the sake of gain, encourage and assist them, by buying or selling their goods, you are so far responsible for the consequences: you encourage them in sin; you expose them to mischief.

And have you so learned Christ? Is this the testimony you give of the uprightness of your hearts and ways? Is it thus you show your compassion for the souls of men? Ah! shake your hands from gain so dearly earned. Think not to support the cause of God with such gain; he hates robbery for burnt-offering. Think it not lawful, or safe, to put a farthing of it into your treasury, lest it secretly communicate a moth and a curse to all that you possess: for it is the price of blood, the blood of souls. If you are indeed a child of God, and will persist in this path after admonition received, be assured your sin will find you out. If the Lord loves you, he will not allow you to prosper in your perverseness. You may rather expect, that, as a little rotted corn is sufficient to spoil the whole heap to which it is laid, so money thus obtained will deprive you of the blessing and comfort you might otherwise expect from your lawful acquisitions.

If you are determined to persist, in opposition to Scripture, to law, to equity and humanity, you have doubtless, as I suppose you a professor, some plea or excuse with which you attempt to justify yourself, and to keep your conscience quiet. See to it, that it be such a one as will bear the examination of a dying hour. You will not surely plead, that "things are come to such a pass, there is no carrying on business upon other terms to advantage!" Will the practice of the world, who know not Christ, be a proper precedent for you, who call

yourself by his name? That cannot be, since his command is, "You shall not follow a multitude to do evil." That the truth and power of his grace may be manifested, he is pleased to put his servants into such situations, that they must forego some seeming advantages, and suffer some seeming hardships, in their worldly connections, if they will approve themselves faithful to him, and live in the exercise of a good conscience. He promises that his grace shall be sufficient for them. It is the blessing of the Lord which makes rich; and for lack of this we see many rise early, take late rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, to no purpose. And I believe, **integrity and diligence in business, with a humble dependence upon his Providence, are the best methods of thriving even in temporals.** However, those who lose for him are in no danger of losing by him. They may be confident of so much as he sees best for them; and they shall have his peace and blessing with it. But if, when you are placed in a state of trial, the love of the world is so powerful in your heart that you cannot resist the temptation of enriching yourself by unlawful means, you have great reason to fear you have not his Spirit, and are therefore none of his.

On Faith, and the Communion of Saints

Dear Sir,

In compliance with your request, I freely give you my sentiments on the particulars you desired: your candor will pass over all inadvertencies, when I give you such thoughts as offer themselves spontaneously, and without study. If the Lord is pleased to bring anything valuable to my mind, I shall be glad to send it to you; and I am willing to believe that when Christians, in his name and fear, are

writing to one another, he does often imperceptibly guide us to drop "a word in season;" which I hope will be the case at present.

The first object of solicitude to an awakened soul, is safety. The law speaks, the sinner hears and fears: a holy God is revealed, the sinner sees and trembles; every false hope is swept away; and all earnest inquiry takes place, "What shall I do to be saved?" In proportion as faith is given, Jesus is discovered as the only Savior, and the question is answered; and as faith increases, fear subsides, and a comfortable hope of life and immortality follows.

When we have thus "a good hope through grace," that heaven shall be our home, I think the next inquiry is, or should be, How we may possess as much of heaven, along the way, as is possible? in other words, How a life of communion with our Lord and Savior may be maintained in the greatest power, and with the least interruption that is consistent with the present imperfect state of things? I am persuaded, dear Sir, this is the point that lies nearest your heart; and therefore I shall speak freely my mind upon it.

In the first place, it is plain, from Scripture and experience, that all our abatements, declensions, and languors, arise from a defect of faith; from the imperfect manner in which we take up the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Scripture. If our apprehensions of him were nearly suitable to the characters he bears in the word of God; if we had a strong and abiding sense of his power and grace always upon our hearts; doubts and complaints would cease. This would make hard things easy, and bitter things sweet, and dispose our hearts with cheerfulness to do and suffer the whole will of God; living upon and to him, as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, joy, and supreme end, we should live a heaven upon earth. The face

of the question is therefore a little changed, and amounts to this,
What are the means to increase and strengthen our faith?

I apprehend, that the growth of faith, no less than of all other graces, of which faith is the root, is gradual, and ordinarily effected in the use of appointed means; yet not altogether arbitrary, but appointed by him who knows our frame; and therefore works in us, in a way suited to those capacities he has endued us with.

I. If faith arises from the knowledge of Christ, and this knowledge is only contained in the word of God—it follows, that a careful, frequent perusal of the Scriptures, which testify of him, is a fit and a necessary means of improving our faith.

II. If, besides the outward revelation of the word, there must be a revelation of the Spirit of God likewise, whose office it is "to take of the things of Jesus, and show them to the soul," by and according to the written word (John 16:14; 2Co. 3:18); and if this Spirit is promised and limited to those who ask; then it follows likewise, that secret prayer is another necessary means of strengthening faith. Indeed, these two I account the prime ordinances. If we were providentially, and not willfully, restrained from all the rest, the word of grace and the throne of grace would supply their lack: with these we might be happy in a dungeon, or in a desert; but nothing will compensate the neglect of these. Though we should be engaged in a course of the best conversation, and sermons, from one end of the week to the other, we would languish and starve in the midst of plenty, our souls would grow dry and lean, unless these secret exercises were kept up with some degree of exactness.

III. Another means to this purpose, is faithfulness to light already received; John 14:15-24, especially John 14:21. It is worth observation, that faith and fidelity, the act of dependence and the

purpose of obedience, are expressed in the Greek by the same word. Though the power is all of God, and the blessing of mere free grace; yet if there is any secret reserve, any allowed evil connived at in the heart and life, this will shut up the avenues to comfort, and check the growth of faith. I lay very little stress upon that faith or comfort which is not affected by unsteady walking.

The experience of past years has taught me to distinguish between ignorance and disobedience. The Lord is gracious to the weakness of his people; many involuntary mistakes will not interrupt their communion with him; he pities their infirmity, and teaches them to do better. But if they dispute his known will, and act against the dictates of conscience, they will surely suffer for it. This will weaken their hands, and bring distress into their hearts. Willful sin sadly perplexes and retards our progress. May the Lord keep us from it! It raises a dark cloud, and hides the Sun of Righteousness from our view; and until he is pleased freely to shine forth again, we can do nothing; and for this perhaps he will make us wait, and cry out often, "How long, O Lord! how long?"

Thus, by reading the word of God, by frequent prayer, by a simple attention to the Lord's will, together with the use of public ordinances, and the observations we are able to make upon what passes within us and without us, which is what we call experience, the Lord watering and blessing with the influence of His Holy Spirit, may we grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior; be more humble in our own eyes, more weaned from self, more fixed on him as our all in all, until at last we shall meet before His throne.

The communion of saints—another point you desired my thoughts upon—is the great privilege of all the children of God; they may be separate from each other in body, and yet may daily meet at the

Throne of Grace. This is one branch of the communion of saints, to be present in spirit to each other. Sharing in common of the influences of the same Spirit, they feel the same desires, aim at the same objects, and, so far as they are personally acquainted, are led to bear each other upon their hearts in prayer.

It has often been an encouragement to me in a dark and dull hour, when rather the constraint of duty than the consideration of privilege has brought me upon my knees, to reflect how many hearts, and eyes, and hands, have been probably lifted up in the same moment with mine: this thought has given me new courage. O what a great family our Father has! And what David says of the natural is true of the spiritual life: (Psalm 104:1-35). "These all wait upon you, that you may give them their food in due season. What you give them, they gather: you open your hand, and they are filled with good." Then I particularly think of those who have been helpful to me in time past; the seasons of sweet communion we have enjoyed together, the subjects of our mutual complaints, etc. Where are they, or how engaged, now? Perhaps this moment praying or thinking about me. Then I am roused to make their cases my own, and, by attempting to plead for them, I get strength to pray for myself.

It is an encouragement, no doubt, in a field of battle, to know that the army we belong to is large, unanimous, all in action, pressing on from every side against the common enemy, and gaining ground in every attack. But if we derive fresh spirits from considering our friends and associates on earth, how should we take fire if we could penetrate within the veil, and take a view of the invisible world! We would not then complain that we were serving God alone. Oh the numbers, the voices, the raptures, of that heavenly multitude! Not one complaining note, not one discordant string. How many

thousand years has the harmony been strengthening, by the hourly accession of new voices!

I sometimes compare this earth to a temporary gallery or stage, erected for all the heirs of glory to pass over, that they may join in the coronation of the Great King; a solemnity in which they shall not be mere spectators, but deeply interested parties; for he is their husband, their Lord; they bear his name, and shall share in all his honors. Righteous Abel led the van—the procession has been sometimes broader; sometimes narrowed to almost a single person, as in the days of Noah. After many generations had successively entered and disappeared, the King himself passed on in person, preceded by one chosen harbinger: he received many insults on his passage; but he bore all for the sake of those he loved, and entered triumphant into his glory.

He was followed by twelve faithful servants, and after them the procession became wider than ever. There are many yet unborn who must (as we do now) tread in the steps of those gone before; and when the whole company is arrived, the stage shall be taken down and burnt.

Then all the chosen race shall meet before the throne,
Shall bless the conduct of his grace, and make his wonders known.

Let us then, dear Sir, be of good courage: all the saints on earth, all the saints in heaven, the angels of the Lord, yes, the Lord of angels himself, all are on our side. Though the company is large, yet there is room—many mansions—a place for you—a place, I trust, for worthless me.

The Duke of Sully

December, 1772

Dear sir,

I lately employed some of my leisure hours (which, when I am not indolent, are but few) in reading the Memoirs of **the Duke of Sully**, which occasionally came in my way. It afforded me matter for variety of reflections. I pity the Duke of Sully, whose attachment to the name of *Protestant* seems to have been little more than a point of honor, who drew all his resources from himself, and whose chief aim seems to have been to approve himself faithful to an earthly master. He acted as well as could be expected from natural principles; and the Lord, who employed him as an instrument of his providence, rewarded his fidelity with success, honor, and riches--a reward which, though in itself a poor one, is suited to the desires of men who place their happiness in worldly things, and is so far a compensation of their services.

It is given to you, to act from nobler principles, and with more enlarged views. You serve a Master, of whose favor, protection, and assistance you cannot be deprived; who will not overlook or misconstrue the smallest service you attempt for him; who will listen to no insinuations against you; who is always near to comfort, direct, and strengthen you; and who is preparing for you such honors and blessings as he only can give--an eternal inheritance (the reverse of all earthly good). Thus animated and thus supported, assisted likewise by the prayers of thousands, may we not warrantably hope that you will be an instrument of great good, and that both church and state will be benefitted by your example, counsels, and care?

In another view, the Duke of Sully's history exhibits a comment upon the Psalmist's words, "Surely man in his best estate--is altogether

vanity!" View him in one light, he seems to have possessed all that the most aspiring mind could aim at--the favor and confidence of his prince, accumulated wealth, great honors, and such power, by his offices and influence with the King, that he could almost do what he pleased. Yet he had so much to suffer from the fatigues and difficulties of his station, and the cabals and malice of his enemies, that, in the midst of all his grandeur, a dispassionate mind would rather *pity* than *envy* him. And how suddenly were his schemes broken by the death of the King! Then he lost his friend, his protector, his influence. The remainder of his days were embittered by many inquietudes: he lived indeed (if that could afford any consolation) in much state and pageantry afterwards; but, after having toiled through more than fourscore years, died at last of a broken heart from domestic uneasiness. And is this all that the world can do for those who are accounted most successful! Alas! *Too low they build--who build below the skies!*

And what a picture of the *instability of human things*, have we in his master, Henry! Admired, beloved, dreaded; full of vast designs; fondly supposing himself born to be the arbiter of Europe--in an awful moment, and in the midst of his friends, suddenly struck from the height of his grandeur, and snatched into the invisible, unchangeable world! In that moment all his thoughts and designs perished!

How unspeakably awful, is such a transition! How remarkable were his own foreboding of the approaching hour! *O Lord, how do you pour contempt upon princes, and teach us that the great and the small are equally in your hands, and at your disposal, as clay in the hands of the potter!* Poor king! while he expected obedience to his own commands--he lived in habitual defiance of the commands of God. Men may respect his memory, for his sincerity, benevolence,

and other amiable qualities; but, besides that he was engrossed by a round of sensual pleasure (when business of state did not interfere), his life was stained with adultery. Happy, if in the hours he spent in retirement, when the pre-intimation of his death hung heavy upon his mind--if the Lord would have humbled and softened his heart, and gave him repentance unto life! I wish the history afforded a proof of this. However, in his death we see an affecting proof, that no human dignity or power can ward off the stroke of the Almighty, who by such sudden and unexpected dispensations, often shows himself dreadful to the princes and great men of the earth. O that they could see His hand--and wisely consider his works in them!

But happy is the man who fears the Lord, and delights in his commandments; who sets God always before him, and acts under the constraining influence of Redeeming Love! He is the real friend and the best champion of his country--who makes, not the vague notions of human wisdom and honor--but the precepts and example of the blessed Jesus--the model and the motive of his conduct. He inculcates (as occasion offers) the great truths of Christian religion in his conversation, and demonstrates them by his practice; yet the best part of his life is known only to God and himself. His time is divided between serving his country in public, and wrestling for it in private.

Nor shall his labors or his prayers be lost. Either he shall have the desire of his heart, and shall see the religion and the liberty which he so highly values transmitted to posterity; or, if he should live when wrath is decreed, and there is no remedy, the promise and the providence of God shall seal him as the peculiar charge of angels, in the midst of public calamity. And when all things are involved in confusion, when the hearts of the wicked shall shake like the leaves of the forest--he shall be kept in perfect peace, trusting in the Lord.

Lead us Not into Temptation

July, 1776

Dear sir

That I may not weary you by a preamble, I oblige myself to take the turn of my letter from some passage of Scripture; and I fix upon that which just now occurred to my thoughts—a clause in that pattern of prayer which He who best knows our state, has been pleased to leave for the instruction of his people in their great concern of waiting at his throne of grace; Mat. 6:13, "*lead us not into temptation.*" This petition is seasonable at all times, and to all people who have any right knowledge of themselves, or their spiritual calling.

The word *temptation*, taken at large, includes every kind of trial. To tempt, is to try or prove. In this sense, it is said, the Lord tempted Abraham—that is, he tried him; for God cannot tempt to *evil*. He proposed such an act of obedience to him, as was a test of his faith, love, dependence, and integrity. Thus, all our afflictions, under his gracious management, are appointed to prove, manifest, exercise, and purify the graces of his children. And not *afflictions* only, *prosperity* likewise is a state of temptation; and many who have endured sharp sufferings, and came off honorably, have been afterwards greatly hurt and ensnared by *prosperity!* To this purpose the histories of David and Hezekiah are in point.

But by temptation we more frequently understand *the wiles and force which Satan employs in assaulting our peace, or spreading snares for our feet*. He is always practicing against us, either directly and from himself, by the access he has to our hearts, or mediately, by the influence he has over the men and the things of this world. The

words which follow confirm this sense: "Lead us not into temptation—but deliver us from evil," or from the *evil one*, as it might be properly- rendered here, and in 1 Jo. 5:19. The subtlety and power of this adversary are very great—he is an over-match for us; and we have no hope of safety—but in the Lord's protection.

Satan's action upon the heart may be illustrated by the action of the wind upon the sea. The sea sometimes appears smooth; but it is always disposed to swell and rage, and to obey the impulse of every storm. Thus, the heart may be sometimes quiet; but the wind of temptation will awaken and rouse it in a moment; for it is essential to our depraved nature to be unstable and yielding as the water. And when it is under the impression of the enemy, its violence can only be controlled by Him who says to the raging sea, "Be still, and here shall your proud waves be stayed." The branches of temptation are almost innumerable; but the principal may be reduced to the several faculties of the soul (as we commonly speak), to which they are more directly suited.

He has temptations for the **understanding**. He can blind the mind with prejudices and false reasoning, and ply it with arguments for infidelity, until the most obvious truths become questionable. Even where the Gospel has been received, he can insinuate *error*, which, for the suddenness and malignity of its effects, may be properly compared to *poison*. A healthy man may be poisoned in a moment; and if he is—the baneful drug is usually mixed with his food. Many, who for a while seemed to be sound in the faith, have had their judgments strongly and strangely perverted, and prevailed upon to renounce and oppose those truths they once prized and defended. Such instances are striking proofs of human weakness, and loud calls to watchfulness and dependence, and to beware of leaning to our own understandings. For these purposes he employs both preachers

and authors, who, by fine words and fair speeches, beguile the hearts of the unwary. And, by his immediate influence upon the mind, he is able (if the Lord permits him) to entangle those who are providentially placed out of the reach of corrupt and designing men.

He tempts the **conscience**. By working upon the unbelief of our hearts, and darkening the glory of the Gospel, he can hold down the soul by the number, weight, and aggravation of its sins—so that it shall not be able to look up to Jesus, nor draw any comfort from his blood, promises, and grace. How many go burdened in this manner, seeking relief by performing duties, and perhaps spending their strength in things not commanded, though they hear, and perhaps acknowledge, the Gospel? Nor are the wisest and most established able to withstand his assaults—if the Lord withdraw, and give him permission to employ his power and subtlety unrestrained. The Gospel affords sufficient ground for an abiding assurance of hope; nor should we rest satisfied without it: however, the possession and preservation of this privilege depends upon the Lord's presence with the soul, and his shielding us from Satan's attacks; for I am persuaded that he is able to sift and shake the strongest believer upon earth.

He has likewise temptations suited to the **will**. Jesus makes his people willing in the day of his power; yet there is a contrary principle remaining within them, of which Satan knows how to avail himself. There are occasions in which he almost prevails to set *self* again upon the throne, as Dagon was raised after he had fallen before the ark. How else should any, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious—give way to a repining spirit, account his dispensations hard, or his precepts too strict—so as to shrink from their observance, through the fear of men, or a regard to their worldly interest?

Farther: he has snares for the **affections**. In managing these, he gains a great advantage from our situation in a world which does not know God. The Scripture gives Satan the title of *god of this world*; and believers learn, by painful experience, how great his power is in and over the people and things of it—so that to be steadfast in wisdom's ways requires unremitted efforts, like pressing through a crowd, or swimming against a stream. How hard is it to live in the midst of *pitch* and not be defiled? *The air of the world is infectious*. Our business and unavoidable connections are so interwoven with occasions of sin, and there is so much in our hearts suited to them, that unless we are incessantly upheld by Almighty strength, we cannot stand a day—or an hour. Past victories afford us no greater security than they did Samson, who was shamefully surprised by enemies whom he had formerly conquered.

Nor are we only tempted by compliance's which are **evil** in themselves. With respect to these, perhaps, conscience may be awake, and we stand upon our guard; but we are still upon Satan's ground; and while he may seem to allow himself defeated, he can dexterously change his method, and come upon us where we do not suspect him.

Perhaps our greatest danger arises from things in themselves **lawful**. He can tempt us by our nearest and dearest friend, and pervert every blessing of a *kind Providence* into an occasion of drawing our hearts from the Giver! Yes, spiritual blessings, gifts, comforts, and even graces—are sometimes the engines by which he practices against us, to fill with vain confidence and self-sufficiency, or to lull us into formality and indolence.

That wonderful power which we call the **imagination**, partakes largely of that depravity which sin has brought upon our whole

frame, and affords Satan an avenue for assaulting us with the most terrifying, if not the most dangerous, of his temptations. At the best, we have but a poor command over it. We cannot, by an act of our own will, exclude a thousand painful, wild, inconsistent, and hurtful ideas, which are ever ready to obtrude themselves upon our minds: and a slight alteration in the body, in the motion of the blood or nervous spirits, is sufficient to withdraw it wholly from our dominion, and to leave us, like a city without walls or gates—exposed to the incursion of our enemy!

We are fearfully and wonderfully made; and, with all our boasted knowledge of other things, can form no conception of what is so vastly interesting to us—the mysterious connection between *soul* and *body*, and the manner in which they are mutually affected by each other. The effects we too sensibly feel. The wisest of men would be accounted fools or mad, were they to express in words, a small part of what passes within them! And it would appear that much of the soberest life—is little better than a waking dream! But how dreadful are the consequences, when the Lord permits some *hidden pin* in the human machine to be altered! Immediately a door flies open, which no hand but his can shut—and the enemy pours in, like a flood, falsehood and horror, and the blackness of darkness; the judgment is borne down and disabled, and the most distressing illusions seize us with all the apparent force of evidence and demonstration.

When this is the case in a certain high degree—we call it a mental derangement. But there are various degrees of it, which leave a person in the possession of his senses as to the things of common life, and yet are sufficient, with respect to his spiritual concerns, to shake the very foundations of his hope, and deprive him of all peace and comfort, and make him a terror to himself. All the Lord's people are not called to navigate in these *deep waters of soul distress*; but

all are liable. Ah! if we knew what some suffer—whom Satan is permitted to tyrannize in this way, surely we should be more earnest and frequent in praying, "Lead us not into temptation."

From some little sense I have of the malice and subtlety of our spiritual enemies, and the weakness of those barriers which we have to prevent their assaults—I am fully persuaded that nothing less than the continual exertion of that Almighty Power which preserves the stars in their orbits—can maintain our peace of mind for an hour or a minute.

In this view, all comparative difference in *external situations* seems to be annihilated. For as the Lord's presence can make his people happy in a dungeon, so there are temptations, which, if we felt them, would instantly render us incapable of receiving a moment's satisfaction from an assemblage of all earthly blessings, and make the company of our dearest friends tasteless, if not insupportable.

Ah! how little do the mirthful and the frivolous think of these things! How little indeed do they think of them—who profess to believe them! How faint is the sense of our obligations to Him, who freely submitted to the fiercest onsets of the powers of darkness, to free us from the punishment due to our sins; otherwise we must have been forever shut up with those miserable and merciless spirits, who delight in our torment, and who, even in the present state, if they get access to our minds, can make our existence a burden!

But our Lord, who knows and considers our weakness, of which we are so little aware, allows and directs us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation!" We are not to expect an absolute freedom from temptation; we are called to be soldiers, and must sometimes meet with enemies, and perhaps with wounds. Yet, considering this prayer

as provided by Him who knows what we are, and where we are, it may afford us both instruction and consolation.

It calls to a constant reflection upon our own weakness. Believers, especially young ones, are prone to rest too much in *grace received*. They feel their hearts warm; and, like Peter, are ready to please themselves with thinking how they would act in such or such a state of trial. It is as if the Lord had said, *Poor worms, be not high-minded—but fear and pray, that, you may be kept from learning by bitter experience—how weak your supposed strength is*. It sweetly intimates, that all our ways, and all our enemies, are in the hands of our great Shepherd. He knows our path. We are short-sighted, and cannot tell what an hour may bring forth. But we are under his protection; and if we depend upon him, we need not be anxiously afraid. He will be faithful to the trust we repose in him, and will allow no temptation to overtake us—but what he will support us under and bring us through. But it becomes us to beware of carnal security and presumption, to keep our eyes upon him, and not to think ourselves safe a moment longer than our spirits feel and breathe the meaning of this petition.

It implies, likewise, the duty of *watchfulness* on our part; as our Lord joins them elsewhere, "*Watch and pray*." If we desire not to be *led* into temptation, surely we are not to *run* into it. If we wish to be preserved from error—we are to guard against a curious and reasoning spirit. If we would preserve peace of conscience, we must beware of trifling with the light and motions of the Holy Spirit—for without his assistance we cannot maintain faith in exercise. If we would not be ensnared by the men of the world—we are to keep at a proper distance from them. The less we have to do with them—the better; excepting so far as the providence of God makes it our duty in the discharge of our callings and relations, and taking opportunities

of doing them good. And though we cannot wholly shut Satan out of our imaginations, we should be cautious that we do not willfully provide fuel for his flame; but entreat the Lord to set a watch upon our eyes and our ears, and to teach us to reject the first motions and the smallest appearance of evil.

I have been so intent upon my subject, that I have once and again forgot I was writing to you, otherwise I would not have let my paper run to so great a length, which I certainly did not intend when I began. I shall not add to this fault, by making an apology. I have touched upon a topic of great importance to myself. I am one among many who have suffered greatly for lack of paying more attention to my need of this prayer. O that I could be wiser hereafter, and always act and speak as knowing that I am always upon a field of battle, and beset by legions!

Views of Divine truth

June 23, 1775

Dear Sir,

I hope that the Lord will make you comfortable and useful in your present rank as a curate. *Advancement* is not necessary, either to our peace or usefulness. We may live and die contentedly, without the honors and emoluments which aspiring men thirst after, if God is pleased to honor us with a dispensation to preach his Gospel, and to crown our endeavors with a blessing. He who wins souls is wise; wise in the choice of the highest end he can propose to himself in this life; wise in the improvement of the only means by which this desirable end can be attained.

Wherever we cast our eyes, the bulk of the people are ignorant, immoral, careless. They live without God in the world; they are neither awed by his authority, nor affected by his goodness, nor enabled to trust to his promises, nor disposed to aim at his glory. If, perhaps, they have a serious interval, or some comparative sobriety of character, they ground their hopes upon *their own doings, endeavors, or purposes*; and treat the inexpressible love of God revealed in Christ, and the Gospel method of salvation by faith in his name, with neglect, often with contempt.

They have preachers, whom perhaps they hear with some pleasure, because they neither alarm their consciences by insisting on the spirituality and sanction of the Divine Law, nor offend their pride by publishing the humiliating doctrines of that Gospel, which is the power of God through faith unto salvation. Therefore what they do speak, they speak in vain; the world grows worse and worse under their instructions; infidelity and profligacy abound more and more.

For God will own no other doctrine but what the Apostle calls *the truth as it is in Jesus*; that doctrine which drives the sinner from all his vain pleas, and points out the Lord Jesus Christ as the only ground of hope, the supreme object of desire, as appointed of God to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, to all who believe in his name.

When ministers themselves are convinced of sin, and feel the necessity of an almighty Savior, they presently account their former gain but loss; and determine, with the Apostle, to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. In proportion as they do this, they are sure to be wondered at, laughed at, and railed at, if the providence of God, and the constitution of their country, secure them from severer treatment. But they have this invaluable compensation, that they no longer speak without effect. In a greater or less degree, a change takes place in their hearers—the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed; sinners are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; sinful practices are forsaken; and a new course of life in the converts, evidences that they have not followed cunningly devised fables, nor taken up with uncertain notions—but that God has indeed quickened them by his Spirit, and given them an understanding to know him who is true.

The preachers, likewise, while they attempt to teach others, are taught themselves: a blessing descends upon their studies and labors, upon their perusal of the Scripture, upon their attention to what passes within them and around them; the events of every day contribute to throw light upon the Word of God; their views of Divine truth grow more enlarged, connected, and comprehensive; many difficulties, which perplexed them at their first setting out, trouble them no more; the God whom they serve, and on whom they wait, reveals to them those great things, which, though plainly expressed

in the letter of the Scripture, cannot be understood and realized without Divine teaching; 1Co. 2:9-15. Thus they go on from strength to strength, hard things become easy, and a Divine light shines upon their paths. Opposition from men perhaps may increase—they may be represented as those who turn the world upside down; the cry "troublers" will be raised against them; the gates of the temple of preferment will be seldom open to them; but they will have the unspeakable consolation of applying to themselves those lively words of the Apostle, "As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." 2 Co. 6:10.

It is the strain of evident sincerity which runs through your letters, that gives me a pleasing confidence the Lord is with you. An unselfish desire of knowing the truth, with a willingness to follow it through all disadvantages, is a preparation of the heart which only God can give. He has directed you to the right method—searching the Scripture, with prayer. Go on, and may his blessing attend you. You may see, from what I have written above, what is the desire of my heart for you. But I am not impatient. Follow your heavenly Leader, and in his own time and manner He will make your way plain. I have traveled the path before you. I see what you yet want; I cannot impart it to you—but He can, and I trust He will. It will rejoice my soul to be any way assistant to you; but I am afraid! should not afford you much, either profit or satisfaction, by entering upon a dry defense of creeds and articles.

The truths of Scripture are not like mathematical theorems, which present exactly the same ideas to every person who understands the terms. The Word of God is compared to a mirror, 2Co. 3:18; but it is a mirror in which—the longer we look, the more we see! The view

will be still growing upon us, and still we shall see but *in part* while on this side eternity. When our Lord pronounced Peter blessed, declaring he had learned that which flesh and blood could not have taught him—yet Peter was at that time much in the dark. The sufferings and death of Jesus, though the only and necessary means of his salvation, were an offense to him. But he lived to glory in, what he once could not bear to hear of. Peter had received grace to love the Lord Jesus, to follow him, to venture all and to forsake all for him—these first good dispositions were of God, and they led to further advances.

So it is still. By nature, *SELF* rules in the heart. When this idol is brought low, and we are truly willing to be the Lord's, and to apply to Him for strength and direction, that we may serve Him—the good work is begun. For it is a truth that holds universally and without exception, "*a man can receive nothing except it be given him from God.*" The Lord first finds us when we are thinking of something else (Isa. 65:1), and then we begin to seek him in good earnest, and he has promised to be found of us. People may, by industry and natural abilities, make themselves masters of the external evidences of Christianity, and have much to say for and against different schemes and systems of sentiments; but all this while the heart remains untouched.

True religion is not a science of the *head*—so much as an inward and heart-felt perception, which casts down imaginations, and everything that exalts itself in the mind, and brings every thought into a sweet and willing subjection to Christ by faith. Here the learned have no real advantage above the ignorant; both see when the eyes of the understanding are enlightened; until then, both are equally blind. *And the first lesson in the school of Christ—is to become a little child, sitting simply at his feet, that we may be made wise unto salvation.*

I was not only prevented beginning my letter as soon as I wished—but have been unusually interrupted since I began it. Often, as soon as I could well take the pen in hand, I have been called away to attend company and intervening business. Though I persuade myself, after what I have formerly said, you will put a favorable construction upon my delay—yet it has given me some pain. I set a great value upon your offer of friendship, which I trust will not be interrupted, on either side, by the freedom with which we mutually express our difference of sentiments, when we are constrained to differ. You please me with entrusting me with the first rough draught of your thoughts; and you may easily perceive by my manner of writing, that I place equal confidence in your candor. I shall be glad to exchange letters as often as it suits us, without constraint, ceremony, or apology—and may He who is always present with our hearts make our correspondence useful. I pray God to be your sun and shield, your light and strength, to guide you with his eye, to comfort you with his gracious presence in your own soul, and to make you a happy instrument of comforting many!

The Christian's Creed

April 3, 1759.

Dear Sir,

I know not if my heart was ever more united to any person, in so short a space of time, than to you; and what engaged me so much, was the spirit of meekness and of love (that special and inimitable mark of true Christianity) which I observed in you. I mean it not to *your* praise. May all the praise be to *Him*, from whom every good and perfect gift comes--who alone makes the best to differ from the

vilest of men. But I think I may well mention, to your encouragement, that all who conversed with you greatly regret your speedy departure; and I am persuaded, the same temper, the same candor, will make you acceptable, honorable, and useful, wherever you go. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers; they shall obtain the mercy they need, and possess the peace they love. They shall inherit the earth. The earth, sinful and miserable as it is, shall be worthy to be called an inheritance to them, for they shall enjoy a comparative heaven in it. They shall be called the children of God, though dignified with no title among men. Alas! how much are these things overlooked, even by many who, I would hope, are real believers.

Methinks a very different spirit from that of the church of Laodicea is to be seen among us; though perhaps it is not easy to say which is the best of the two. Laodicea was neither cold nor hot; we are both cold and hot at once, and both to the extreme. Hot, hasty, and arbitrary, in those few things where mediocrity is a virtue; but cool and remiss in those great points, where the application of the whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, is so absolutely necessary, and so positively enjoined. Surely there is too much room for this observation, and I perhaps stand self-condemned in making it.

I hope you will take opportunity to improve your interest in Mr. **** by letter. He expressed much satisfaction in the hour he spent with you before you sailed, and a great regard for you; therefore would, I doubt not, give you a fair hearing. He makes such large concessions sometimes, that I am apt to think he is conscious of the weakness of his own argument; and then he is as soon angry with himself for complying so far, and flies off to the other extreme. Yet for the most part, when he speaks plain, and is not restrained by complaisance for particular people, he appears not only a stranger to experimental

religion--but averse to the notion, and generally inclined to treat it with levity. His obstacles are very many and very great; his reputation as a learned man, his years, his regular life, and perhaps, above all, his performances in print, especially his last book--are so many barriers that must be brake through before conviction can reach him. But the grace of God can do all this, and more; and indeed, when I think of the many truly valuable parts of his character, and the indefatigable pains he has taken in his researches after truth, I am willing to hope that the Lord will at length teach him the true wisdom, and enable him (however hard it may seem) to give up his own attainments, and sit down like a little child at the feet of Jesus.

I hope to hear soon and often from you. I number my Christian correspondents among my principal blessings; a few judicious pious friends, to whom, when I can get leisure to write, I send my heart by turns. I can trust them with my inmost sentiments, and can write with no more disguise than I think. I shall rejoice to add you to the number, if you can agree to take me as I am (as I think you will), and allow me to commit my whole self to paper, without respect to names, parties, and sentiments. I endeavor to observe my Lord's commands, to call no man master upon earth; yet I desire to own and honor the image of God wherever I find it.

I dare not say I have no bigotry: for I know not myself; and remember to my shame, that formerly, when I ignorantly professed myself free from it, I was indeed overrun with it. But this I can say, I allow it not; I strive and pray against it; and thus far, by the grace of God, I have attained, that I find my heart as much united to many who differ from me in some points, as to any who agree with me in all. **I set no value upon any doctrinal truth, farther than it has a tendency to promote practical holiness.** If others should

think those things *hindrances*--which I judge to be *helps* in this respect, I am content they should go on in their own way, according to the light God has given them.

If it should be asked--*Which are the necessary things?* I answer--Those in which the spiritual worshipers of all ages and countries have been agreed. Those, on the contrary, are mere subordinate matters, in which the best men, those who have been the most eminent for faith, prayer, humility, and nearness to God, always have been, and still are, divided in their judgments. Upon this plan, I should think it no hard matter to draw up a form of sound words (whether dignified with the name of a *creed* or not--I care not), to which true believers of all sorts would unanimously subscribe. Suppose it ran something in the following manner:

"I believe that sin is the most hateful thing in the world. I believe that I and all men are by nature in a state of wrath and depravity, utterly unable to sustain the penalty or to fulfill the commands of God's holy law; and that we have no sufficiency of ourselves to think a good thought. I believe that Jesus Christ is the chief among ten thousand; that he came into the world to save the chief of sinners, by making a propitiation for sin by his death, by paying a perfect obedience to the law in our behalf; and that he is now exalted on high, to give repentance and remission of sins to all who believe; and that he ever lives to make intercession for us. I believe that the Holy Spirit (the gift of God through Jesus Christ), is the sure and only guide into all truth, and the common privilege of all believers; and under his influence, I believe the holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, and to furnish us thoroughly for every good work. I believe that love to God, and to man for God's sake, is the essence of true religion, and the fulfilling of the law; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; that those who, by a patient course in well-doing,

seek glory, honor, and immortality, shall receive eternal life. And I believe that this reward is not of *debt*--but of *grace*, even to the praise and glory of that grace whereby He has made us accepted in the Beloved. Amen."

I pretend not to accuracy in this hasty draught; they are only outlines, which, if you please to retouch, and fill up at your leisure, I hope you will favor me with a sight of it. I fear I have tired you. I shall only add my prayers, that the Lord may be with you, and crown your labors of love with success, that you may hereafter shine among those who have been instrumental in turning many to righteousness.

Divine Revelation

July 14, 1775

My Dear Friend,

I confess, I am not a friend to that lukewarmness and indifference for truth, which bears the name of *candor* among many in the present day. I desire to maintain a spirit of candor and benevolence to all men, to wish them well, to do them every good office in my power, and commend what appears to me commendable in a Socinian, as readily as in a Calvinist. But I must judge of *principles* by the Word of God, and of the *tree* by its fruit. I meddle with no man's final state; because I know that He who is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins, can do it whenever, and to whoever, he is pleased. Yet I firmly believe, and I make no scruple of proclaiming it, that swearers, drunkards, adulterers, *continuing such*, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. And I look with no less compassion upon some people whose characters in common life may be respectable, when I see them unhappily blinded by their own carnal wisdom; and, while

they account themselves, and are accounted by many others, master-builders in Zion, rejecting the only foundation upon which a sinner's hope can be safely built.

I am far from thinking that the Socinians are all hypocrites—but I think they are all in a most *dangerous error*; nor do their principles exhibit to my view a whit more of the genuine fruits of Christianity than deism itself. You say, "If they are sincere, and fail not for lack of diligence in searching, I cannot help thinking that God will not condemn them for an inevitable defect in their understandings." Indeed, my friend, I have such a low opinion of man in his depraved state, that I believe no one has real sincerity in religious matters—until God bestows it! And when he makes a person sincere in his desires after truth—he will assuredly guide him to the possession of it in due time, as our Lord speaks, John 6:44-45. To suppose that any people can sincerely seek the way of salvation, and yet miss it through an inevitable defect of their understandings, would contradict the plain promises of the Gospel, such as Mat. 7:7-8, John 7:16-17. But to suppose that nothing is necessary to be known, which some people who profess sincerity cannot receive, would be in effect to make the Scripture a nose of wax, and open a wide door for skepticism.

I am not a judge of the heart; but I may be sure that whoever makes the Foundation-stone a rock of offense, cannot be sincere in his inquiries. He may study the Scripture accurately—but he brings his own pre-conceived sentiments with him, and, instead of submitting them to the touchstone of truth, he makes *them* a rule by which he interprets. That those who lean to their own understandings should stumble and miscarry, I cannot wonder; for the same God who has promised to fill the *hungry* with good things, has threatened to send the *rich* empty away. So Mat. 11:25. It is not through defect of

understanding—but a lack of *simplicity* and *humility*, that so many stumble like the blind at noon-day, and see nothing of those great truths which are written in the Gospel as with a sun-beam.

You wish me to explain myself concerning the doctrine of the *Trinity*. I will try—yet I know I cannot, any farther than as he who taught me shall be pleased to bear witness in your heart to what I say. My first principle in religion, is what the Scripture teaches me of the utter depravity of human nature. I believe we are by nature sinners, and by practice we are universally transgressors; that we are dead in trespasses and sins; and that the bent of our natural spirit is enmity against the holiness, government, and grace of God. Upon this ground, I see, feel, and acknowledge the necessity of such a salvation as the Gospel proposes; which, at the same time that it precludes boasting, and stains the pride of all human glory, affords encouragement to those who may be thought, or who may think themselves, the weakest or the vilest of mankind.

I believe, that whatever notions a person may take up from education—that no one ever did, or ever will, feel himself and own himself to be such a lost, miserable, hateful sinner—unless he is powerfully and supernaturally convinced by the Spirit of God. When God pleases—there is a certain light thrown into the soul, which differs not merely in degree—but in kind—from anything that can be effected or produced by moral persuasion or argument.

But (to take in another of your queries) the Holy Spirit teaches or reveals no new truths, either of doctrine or precept—but only enables us to understand what is already revealed in the Scripture. Here a change takes place—the person who was spiritually blind begins to see. The sinner's character, as described in the Word of God—he finds to be a description of himself—that he is afar off from God—a

stranger to God—a rebel against Him; and that he has hitherto lived in vain! Now he begins to see the necessity of an atonement, an advocate, a shepherd, a comforter. He can no more trust to his own wisdom, strength, and goodness; but, accounting all his former gain but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ—he renounces every other refuge, and ventures his all upon the person, work, and promise of the Redeemer!

In this way, I say, he will find the doctrine of the Trinity not only a proposition—but a principle: that is, from his own needs and situation, he will have an abiding conviction that the Son and Holy Spirit are God, and must be possessed of the attributes and powers of Deity, to support the offices the Scriptures assign them, and to deserve the confidence and worship the Scriptures require to be placed in them, and paid to them. Without this awakened state of mind—a theologian, reputed orthodox, will blunder wretchedly even in defending his own opinions. I have seen labored defenses of the Trinity which have given me not much more satisfaction than I would probably receive from a dissertation upon the rainbow composed by a man blind from his birth!

In effect, the true knowledge of God cannot be attained by studies on our part; it must be by a revelation on his part. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to *reveal* Him." Matthew 11:27. "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not *revealed* to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." Matthew 16:17. This is a revelation, not objectively of new truth—but subjectively of new light in us. Then he who runs may read. Perhaps you may not quite understand my meaning, or not accede to my sentiment at present. I have little doubt, however—but the time is coming when you will. I

believe the Lord God has given you that sincerity, which he never disappoints.

Far be it from me to arrogate infallibility to myself, or to any writer or preacher; yet, blessed be God, I am not left to float up and down the uncertain tide of opinion, in those points wherein the peace of my soul is nearly concerned. I know, yes I infallibly know, whom I have believed. I am under no more doubt about the way of salvation, than of the way to London. I cannot be deceived, because the Word of God cannot deceive me.

It is impossible, however, for me to give you, or any person, full satisfaction concerning my evidence, because it is of an *experimental* nature; Rev. 2:17. In general, it arises from the views I have received of the power, compassion, and grace of Jesus, and a consciousness that I, from a conviction of my sin and misery, have fled to him for refuge, entrusted and devoted myself and my all to him. Since my mind has been enlightened, everything within me, and everything around me, confirms and explains to me what I read in Scripture; and though I have reason enough to distrust my own judgment every hour—yet I have no reason to question the great essentials, which the Lord himself has taught me.

I take great pleasure in your correspondence, still more in the thought of your friendship, which I hope to cultivate to the utmost, and to approve myself sincerely and affectionately yours.

Saving Knowledge

August 11, 1775

My dear Friend,

I thank you for your letter. Your objections neither displease nor weary me. While *truth* is the object of your inquiry, the more freedom you use with me the better. Nor do they surprise me; for I have formerly made similar objections myself. I have stood upon your ground—and I continue to hope you will one day stand upon mine! As I have told you more than once, I do not mean to dictate to you, or to wish you to receive anything upon my recommendation; but, in the simplicity of friendship, I will give you my thoughts from time to time upon the points you propose, and leave the outcome to the Divine blessing.

The term *Arminian*, as at present applied, is very indiscriminate, and takes in a great variety of people and sentiments, among whom, I believe, there are many who hold the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and live a life of faith in the Son of God. I am far from supposing that God will guide every sincere person exactly to adopt all my sentiments. But there are some sentiments which I believe essential to the very state and character of a true Christian. And these make him a Christian; not merely by being his acknowledged sentiments—but by a certain peculiar manner in which he possesses them.

There is a certain important change which takes place in the heart, by the operation of the Spirit of God, before the soundest and most orthodox sentiments can have their proper influence upon us. This work, or change, the Scripture describes by various names, each of which is designed to teach us the marvelous effects it produces, and the Almighty power by which it is produced. It is sometimes called a new birth, John 3:3; sometimes a new creature, or new creation, as 2 Co. 5:17; sometimes the causing light to shine out of darkness, 2 Co.

4:6; sometimes the opening the eyes of the blind, Acts 26:18; sometimes the raising the dead to life, Eph. 2:5. Until a person has experienced this change, he will be at a loss to form a right conception of it. This is not being convinced of a mere opinion—but receiving a principle of Divine life and light in the soul. And until this is received, the things of God, the truths of the Gospel, cannot be rightly discerned or understood by the utmost powers of fallen man, who, with all his wisdom, reason, and talents, is still but what the Apostle calls *the natural man*, until the power of God visits his heart! 1Co. 2:14.

This work is sometimes wrought *suddenly*, as in the case of Lydia, Act. 16:14; at other times very *gradually*. A person who before was a stranger even to the form of godliness, or at best content with a mere religious form, finds new thoughts arising in his mind, feels some concern about his sins, some desire to please God, some suspicions that all is not right. He examines his views of religion, hopes the best of them, and yet cannot rest satisfied in them. Today, perhaps, he thinks himself fixed; tomorrow he will be all uncertainty. He inquires of others; weighs, measures, considers; meets with sentiments which he had not attended to; thinks them plausible; but is presently shocked with objections, or supposed consequences, which he finds himself unable to remove.

As he goes on in his inquiry, his difficulties increase. New doubts arise in his mind; even the Scriptures perplex him, and appear to assert contrary things. He would sound the depths of truth by the plummet of his *reason*—but he finds his line is too short! Yet even now the man is under a guidance, which will at length lead him right. The importance of the subject takes up his thoughts, and takes off the relish he once had for the things of the world. He reads, he prays, he strives, he resolves. Sometimes inward perplexities and outward

temptations bring him to his wit's end. He almost wishes to stand where he is, and inquire no more—but he cannot stop.

At length he begins to *feel* the inward depravity, which he had before owned as a mere opinion. A sense of sin and guilt cut him out new work. Here reasoning will stand him in no stead. This is a painful change of mind; but it prepares the way for a blessing. It silences some objections better than a thousand arguments; it cuts the web of his own wisdom and attainments; it makes him weary of working for life; and teaches him, in God's due time, the meaning of that text, "To him who *works* not—but believes in him who justifies the ungodly—his faith is counted for righteousness."

Then he learns, that *Scriptural faith* is a very different thing from a *rational assent* to the Gospel; that it is the immediate gift of God, Eph. 2:8; the operation of God, Col. 2:12; that Christ is not only the *object*—but the *author* and *finisher* of faith, Heb. 12:2; and that faith is not so properly a part of that *obedience* we owe to God, as an inestimable *benefit* we receive from him for Christ's sake, Phi. 1:29; which is the medium of our justification, Rom. 5:1, and the principle by which we are united to Christ (as the branch to the vine), John 17:21. I have described a path in which I have known many led, and in which I have walked myself.

The Gospel, my dear sir, is a salvation appointed for those who are ready to perish—and is not designed to put them in a way to save themselves by their own works. It speaks to us as condemned already, and calls upon us to believe in a crucified Savior—that we may receive redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. And the Spirit of God, by the Gospel, first convinces us of unbelief, sin, and misery; and then, by revealing the things of Jesus to our minds, enables us, as helpless sinners, to come to Christ, to

receive him, to behold him; or, in other words, to believe in him, and expect pardon, life, and grace from him; renouncing every hope and aim in which we once rested, "and accounting all things loss and rubbish for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ." John 6:35; Isa. 45:22; with John 6:40; Col. 2:6.

In some of my *Omicron's Letters*, you will find my thoughts more at large upon these subjects than I have now time to write them. You will see in it the sentiments of a man of great learning, sound reasoning, an amiable and irreproachable character, and how little he accounted of all these advantages when the Lord was pleased to enlighten his mind.

Though we have not exactly the same view of human depravity—yet as we both agree to take our measure of it from the Word of God, I trust we shall not always differ about it. Adam was created in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, Eph. 4:24. This *moral* image, I believe, was totally lost by sin. In that sense, he died the day, the moment, he ate the forbidden fruit. God was no longer his joy and delight; he was averse from the thoughts of his presence, and would (if possible) have hid himself from him. His *natural* powers, though doubtless impaired, were not destroyed. Man by nature, is still capable of great things. His understanding, reason, memory, imagination, etc. sufficiently proclaim that the Hand that made him is Divine. He is, as Milton says of Beelzebub, *majestic though in ruins*. He can reason, invent, and by study, attain a considerable knowledge in natural things. The exertions of human genius, as specified in the characters of some philosophers, poets, orators, etc. are astonishing. But man cannot know, love, trust, or serve his Maker—unless he is renewed in the spirit of his mind.

God has preserved in him likewise, some feelings of benevolence, pity, some sense of natural justice and truth, etc. without which there could be no society. But these, I apprehend, are little more than instincts, by which the world is kept in some small degree of order. But, being under the direction of pride and self, do not deserve the name of virtue and goodness, because the exercise of them does not spring from a principle of love to God, nor is directed to his glory, or regulated by the rule of his Word—until a *principle of grace* is superadded.

You think that I will not say, "that God, judicially in punishment of one man's sin, added these corruptions to all his posterity." Let us suppose, that the punishment annexed to eating the forbidden fruit, had been the loss of Adam's rational powers, and that he should be degraded to the state and capacity of a brute. In this condition, had he begotten children after the Fall in his own likeness, his nature being previously changed, they must have been, of course, brutes like himself; for he could not convey to them those original powers which he had lost. Will this illustrate my meaning?

Sin did not deprive him of rationality—but spirituality. His nature became earthly, sensual, yes devilish; and this fallen nature, this carnal mind, which is enmity against God—is not subject to his law, neither indeed can it be, Rom. 8:7—we universally derive from him. Look upon children—they presently show themselves averse from good—but are exceedingly propense to evil. This they can learn even without a master; but ten thousand instructors and instructions cannot instill good into them, so as to teach them to love their Creator—unless a Divine power acts in their hearts. This is just as it is with the earth, which produces weeds spontaneously. But if you see a fruit filled garden—you are sure that it was planted or sown there, and did not spring from the soil by itself.

I know many hard questions may be started upon this subject; but the Lord in due time will clear his own cause, and vindicate his own ways. I leave all difficulties with him. It is sufficient for me that Scripture asserts, and experience proves, that it is thus in fact; Rom. 3:9-21; Job. 14:4.

Thus, we have not only forfeited our happiness by transgression—but are by our depravity, incapable of it—and have no more desire or taste for such a state as the Scripture describes heaven to be, than a man born deaf can have for a concert of music. And therefore our Lord declares, that, unless a man is born again—he not only *shall* not—but *cannot* see the kingdom of God! Hence a twofold necessity of a Savior: his blood for the pardon of our sins; his life, Spirit, and grace, to quicken our souls, and form us anew for himself, that we may feel his love, and show forth his praise.

Paul, before his conversion, was not sincere, in the sense I hope you to be. He thought himself in the right, without doubt, as many have done when they killed God's servants, John 16:2. He was blindly and obstinately zealous. He did not enter into the merits of the Christian cause, or inquire into facts with that attention which sincerity would have put him upon. You think that his sincerity and zeal were the very things that made him a chosen instrument: he himself speaks of them as the very things that made him peculiarly unworthy of that honor, 1Co. 15:9; and he tells us, that he was set forth as a pattern of the Lord's long-suffering and mercy—that the very chief of sinners might be encouraged, 1Ti. 1:15-16. Had he been sincerely desirous to know whether Jesus was the Messiah, there was enough in his character, doctrines, miracles, and the prophecies concerning him—to have cleared up the point. But he took it for granted he was right in his opinion, and hurried blindly on, and was (as he said himself) exceedingly mad against them.

Such a *kind of sincerity* is common enough. People believe themselves right, and therefore treat others with scorn or rage. They appeal to the Scriptures—but first lay down *their own preconceived sentiments* for truths, and then examine what Scriptures they can find to countenance them. Surely a person's thinking himself right, will not give a sanction to all that he does under that persuasion.

Ignorance and *obstinacy* are in themselves sinful, and no *plea of sincerity* will exempt from the danger of being under their influence: Isa. 27:11; Luke 6:39.

It appears to me, that, though you will not follow any man implicitly, you are desirous of discovering your mistakes, supposing you are mistaken in any point of importance. You read and examine the Word of God, not to find weapons with which to defend your sentiments at all events—but to know whether they are defensible or not. You pray for God's light and teaching; and in this search you are willing to risk, what men are commonly much afraid of hazarding—character, interest, preferment, favor, etc. A sincerity of this kind I too seldom meet with; when I do, I account it a token for good, and am ready to say, "No man can do this—unless God is with him." However, *sincerity* is not *conversion*; but I believe it is always a forerunner of it.

I would not be uncharitable and censorious, hasty and peremptory, in judging my fellow-creatures. But if I acknowledge the Word of God—I cannot avoid forming my judgment upon it. It is true, I cannot look into people's hearts; but hearts and principles are delineated to my hand—in the Scripture. I read, that no *murderer* has eternal life in him; I read likewise, "If any man *loves* not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed;" and therefore I conclude, that there are *speculative* errors as heinous in their guilt, as destructive in

their effects, as *murder*—and that the most moral, upright man—if he loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, is in the sight of God, the Judge of all—as displeasing to Him as a murderer!

It has pleased God, for the peace and support of society, to put a *black mark* upon those sins which affect the peace and welfare of our neighbor, such as adultery and murder. But undoubtedly the sins committed immediately against *himself* must be more heinous than any which offend our fellow-creatures. The second commandment, Mat. 22:39, is like the first; but it depends upon it, and is therefore inferior to it. Men ordinarily judge otherwise. To live regardless of God and the Gospel, is looked upon as a *minor fault*—in comparison with offenses against society. But sooner or later it will appear otherwise to all.

A group of robbers may pride themselves upon the justice, honor, and truth they observe towards one another; but because they are a nuisance to the public good, they are deservedly accounted villains, and treated as such, notwithstanding their *petty morality* among themselves. Now, such a company of robbers bears a much greater proportion to a whole nation, than a nation, or all the nations of the earth, bears to the great God. Our dependence upon him is absolute, our obligations to him infinite. In vain shall men plead their moral discharge of relative duties to each other—if they fail in the unspeakably greater relation under which they stand to God. Therefore, when I see people living without God in the world, as all do until they are converted, I cannot but judge them in a dangerous state; not because I take pleasure in censuring, or think myself authorized to pass sentence upon my fellow-creatures—but because the Scripture decides expressly on the case, and I am bound to take my sentiments from thence.

The Philippian jailer was certainly a Christian when baptized, as you observe. He trembled; he cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul did not bid him *amend his life*—but to *believe* in the Lord Jesus. He believed, and rejoiced. But the Lord blessed the Apostle's words, to produce in him that saving faith, which filled him with joy and peace. It was, as I observed before, something more than an *assent to the proposition*, that Jesus is the Christ. It was a resting in him for forgiveness and acceptance, and a cleaving to him in love. No other faith will purify the heart, work by love, and overcome the world.

I feel myself much interested in your concerns; and your unexpected frank application to me, I consider as a providential call, which binds me to your service. I hope our correspondence will be productive of happy effects, and that we shall both one day rejoice in it.

A Christian's Present Blessedness

Dear sir,

The Apostle speaks of a blessedness, which it is the design of the Gospel to impart to those who receive it. The Galatians once had it, and spoke of it. The Apostle reminds them of their loss, which is left upon record as a warning to us. His expression has led me sometimes to consider wherein **a Christian's present blessedness** consists: I mean that which is attainable in this state of trial, and the sense and exercise of which may be, and too often is, suspended and taken from us. It is a blessedness which, if we speak of man in a natural state, his eye has not seen, nor his ear heard so as to understand it, nor can the idea of it arise in his heart. It is no way dependent upon outward circumstances. Prosperity cannot impart it, preserve, or supply the lack of it; nor can adversity put it out of our reach. The wise cannot acquire it by dint of superior abilities; nor shall the simple miss it for lack of capacity.

The state of true believers, compared with that of others, is always *blessed*. If they are born from above, and united to Jesus, they are delivered from condemnation, and are heirs of eternal life, and may therefore well be accounted happy. But I consider now, not their harvest—but their first-fruits; not their portion in reversion—but the portion attainable in this life; not what they shall be in heaven—but what, in an humble attendance upon the Lord, they may be while upon earth.

There is even at present, a prize of our high calling set before us. It is much to be desired, that we had such a sense of its value as might prompt us so to run that we might obtain. I have thought this blessedness may be comprised in five particulars; though, in order to

take a succinct view of the subject, some of these might be branched out into several others; but I would not, by too many subdivisions, give my letter the air of a sermon.

In the first place, **a clear, well-grounded, habitual persuasion of our acceptance in the Beloved, is attainable**; and though we may *be* safe, we cannot be said to enjoy blessedness without it. To be in a state of suspense and uncertainty in a point of so great importance, is painful; and the Lord has accordingly provided that his people may have strong consolation on this head. They are blessed, therefore, who have such views of the power, grace, and suitableness of Jesus, and the certainty and security of redemption in him, together with such a consciousness that they have anchored their hopes, and ventured their all, upon his person, work, and promise—as furnishes them with a ready answer to all the cavils of unbelief and Satan, in the Apostle's manner, Romans 8:31-37. That Paul could thus challenge and triumph over all charges and enemies, was not an appendage of His office as an apostle—but a part of his experience as a believer; and it lies equally open to us. For we have the same Gospel and the same promises as he had; nor is the efficacy of the Holy Spirit's teaching a whit weakened by length of time.

But many stop short of this. They have a hope—but it rather springs from their *frames* and *feelings*, than from a spiritual apprehension of the Redeemer's engagements and fullness, and therefore fluctuates and changes like the weather. Could they be persuaded to pray with earnestness and importunity, as the Apostle prays for them, Eph. 1:17-18, and Eph. 3:16-19, they would find a blessedness which they have not yet known; for it is said, "Ask—and you shall receive;" and it is said likewise, "You receive not—because you ask not."

Could this privilege be enjoyed singly, the natural man would have no objection to it. He would (as he thinks) be pleased to know he would be saved at last—provided that while here he might live in his sins. But the believer will not, cannot think himself blessed, unless he has likewise a conscience void of offense. This was the Apostle's daily exercise, though no one was farther from a legal spirit, or more dependent upon Jesus for acceptance. But if we live in any known sin, or allow ourselves in the customary omission of any known duty, supposing it possible in such a case to preserve a sense of our acceptance (which can hardly be supposed, for if the *Spirit* is grieved, our *evidences* decline of course)—yet we could not be easy.

If a traveler was absolutely sure of reaching his journey's end in safety; yet if he walked with a thorn in his foot, he must take every step in pain. Such a thorn will be felt in the conscience, until we are favored with a simplicity of heart, and made willing in all things, great or small, to yield obedience to the authority of the Lord's precepts, and make them the standing rule of our conduct, without willfully admitting a single exception. At the best, we shall be conscious of innumerable short-comings, and shameful defilement; but these things will not break our peace, if our hearts are upright. But if we trifle with God's Word, and connive at what we know to be wrong, we shall be weak, restless, and uncomfortable. How many, who we would hope are the children of the King, are lean from day to day, because some right-hand or right-eye evil, which they cannot persuade themselves to part with—keeps them halting between two opinions! and they are as distant from happiness, as they are from the possibility of reconciling the incompatible services of God and the world. But happy indeed is he who condemns not himself, in his conduct.

Real communion with the Lord, in his appointed means of grace, is likewise an important branch of this blessedness. They were instituted for this end, and are sufficient, by virtue of his power and Spirit, to answer it. I do not believe this enjoyment will be always equal; but I believe a comfortable sense of it, in some measure, is generally attainable. To read the *Scripture*, not as an *attorney* may read a will, merely to know the sense—but as the *heir* reads it, as a description and proof of his interest; to hear the *Gospel* as the voice of our Beloved, so as to have little leisure either for admiring the abilities or censuring the defects of the preacher; and, in *prayer*, to feel a liberty of pouring out our hearts before the Lord, to behold some glances of his goodness passing before us, and to breathe forth before him the temper of a child, the spirit of adoption; and thus, by beholding his glory, to be conformed more and more to his image, and to renew our strength by drawing water out of the wells of salvation— herein is blessedness! Those who have tasted it can say, *It is good for me to draw near to God!*

The soul thus refreshed by the water of life, is preserved from thirsting after the vanities of the world; thus instructed in the sanctuary, comes down from the mount filled with heavenly wisdom, anointed with a holy unction, and thereby qualified to judge, speak, and act in character, in all the relations and occasions of secular life. In this way, a spiritual taste is acquired, something analogous to the meaning of the word *taste* when applied to music or good-breeding; by which discords and improprieties are observed and avoided, as it were by instinct; and what is right is felt and followed, not so much by the force of rules, as by a *habit insensibly acquired*, and in which the substance of all necessary rules are, if I may so say, *digested*. O that I knew more of this blessedness, and more of its effects!

Another branch of blessedness, is a **power of reposing ourselves and all our concerns upon the Lord's faithfulness and care**; and may be considered in two respects—a reliance upon him that he will surely provide for us, guide us, protect us; be our help in trouble, our shield in danger; so that, however poor, weak, and defenseless in ourselves, we may rejoice in his all-sufficiency as our own. And farther, in consequence of this, a peaceful, humble submission to his will, under all events which, upon their first impression, are contrary to our own views and desires. Surely, in a world like this, where everything is uncertain, where we are exposed to trials on every hand, and know not but a single hour may bring forth something painful, yes dreadful, to our natural sensations, there can be no blessedness—but so far as we are thus enabled to entrust and resign all to the direction and faithfulness of the Lord our Shepherd.

For lack of more of this spirit, multitudes of professing Christians perplex and wound themselves, and dishonor their high calling, by continual anxieties, alarms, and complaints. They think nothing safe under the Lord's keeping, unless *their* own eye is likewise upon it; and are seldom satisfied with any of his dispensations. For though he gratifies their desires in nine instances, a refusal in the tenth spoils the relish of all, and they show the truths of the Gospel can afford them little comfort—if *self* is crossed. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings—he shall be kept in perfect peace, though the earth is moved, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea!

The paper admonishes me it is time to end—and I have not room to detain you long upon the fifth particular. It belongs to a believer's blessedness, **to feel his spirit cheerful and active for the Lord's service in the world**. For to what other end should he wish to live? If he thought of himself only—it would be better to

depart and be with Jesus immediately. But he is a debtor to his grace and love; and though, strictly, he can make no returns—yet he longs to show his thankfulness. And if the Lord gives him a heart to redeem his time, to devote his strength and influence, and lay himself out for his service, that he may be instrumental in promoting his cause, in comforting his people; or enable him to let his light shine before men, that his God and Father may be honored; he will account it blessedness. This is indeed the great end of life, and he knows it will evidently appear so at the approach of death; and therefore, while others are cumbered about many things—he esteems this the one thing needful.

The Heart of Man

October 21, 1775.

My Dear Friend,

The calls and engagements which I told you engrossed and anticipated my time when I wrote last, have continued without any intermission hitherto, and I am still far behind-hand with my business. I am willing to hope, that the case has been much the same with you, and that lack of leisure has been the only cause of my not having been pleased with so much as a note from you since my return from London.

I am reluctant, for my own sake, to charge your silence to any unwillingness of continuing that fellowship which I have been, and still find myself, desirous to improve on my part. For though we are not agreed in our views—yet, while our preliminary agreement, to allow mutual freedom, and to exercise mutual candor, in expressing our sentiments, exists, we may, and I hope shall, be glad to hear from

each other. It may seem to intimate I have a better opinion of myself than of you, that, while I seem confident your freedom will not offend me, I feel now and then a fear lest mine should prove displeasing to you. But friendship is a little suspicious when exercised with long silence; and a plain declaration of my sentiments has, more than once, put amiable and respectable people to the full trial of their patience.

I now return your sermons: I thank you for the perusal. I see much in them that I approve, and nothing in them but what I formerly espoused. But in a course of years a considerable alteration has taken place in my judgment and experience, I hope, yes I may boldly say I am sure, not for the worse. Then I was seeking, and now, through mercy, I have found, the Pearl of great price. It is both the prayer and the hope of my heart, that a day is coming when you shall make the same acknowledgment. From your Letters and Sermons, I am encouraged to address you in our Lord's words, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." I am persuaded the views you have received will not allow you to remain where you are. But *fidelity* obliges me to add, "*Yet one thing you lack.*" That "one thing" I trust the Lord will both show you, and bestow upon you, in his due time.

You speak somewhere of "atoning for disobedience by repentance." Ah! my dear sir, when we are brought to estimate our disobedience, by comparing it with such a sense of the majesty, holiness, and authority of God; and the spirituality, extent, and sanction of his holy law, as he, and he only, can impress upon the heart of a sinner—we shall be convinced that *nothing but the blood of the Son of God can atone for the smallest instance of disobedience!*

I intimated, in my letter from London, one defect of your scheme, which will probably be the first to engage your notice. I am sure you

have a desire to be useful to the souls of men; to be an instrument of reclaiming them from that course of open wickedness, or lifeless formality, in which you see them enslaved; and, in a word, to prevail with them to live soberly, righteously, and godly, according to the just and comprehensive sense you have given of those words in your sermon on Titus 2:11-12.

Now inward experience, and a pretty extensive observation of what passes abroad, have so perfectly convinced me there is but one mode of preaching which the Holy Spirit owns to the producing these effects, that I am not afraid to pronounce confidently—you will not have the desires of your heart gratified upon your present plan! The people will give you a hearing—but remain just as they are, until the Lord leads you to speak to them as criminals condemned already, and whose first essential step it is, to seek forgiveness by the blood of Jesus, and a change of heart and state by his grace, before they can bring forth any fruit acceptable to God.

As I have little time for writing, and little hope of succeeding in a way of argumentation, I have substituted, instead of a longer letter, the heads of some sermons I preached nine or ten years ago, on our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. However, when I have heard that you are well, and that you still are disposed to correspond with me, I shall be ready to give a more particular answer to the subjects you pointed out to me in the letter you favored me with the day before I left London. I pray God to bless you in all your ways, and beg you to believe that I am, with sincerity, etc.

You complain that I have hitherto disappointed your expectations. If you have preserved my first papers, I believe you will find that I apprised you this might probably be the event, and certainly must, unless it should please God to make what I should write a means of

giving you the same views with myself. I only proposed, as a witness, to bear a simple testimony to what I had seen and known. So far as you believed me sincere, and unwilling to impose upon you, I thought you might admit there was perhaps some weight in what I advanced, though for the present you could not see things in the same light. And if you allowed a possibility, that my changing the sentiments which I once held in common with yourself might be upon sufficient grounds, you would, as I trust you do, wait upon the great Teacher for his instruction; otherwise I did not expect to convince you; nor do I yet, only I am glad to put myself in his hands as an *instrument*.

You quite misunderstood what I spoke of the light and influence of the Spirit of God. He reveals to me no new truths—but has only shown me the meaning of his own written Word. Nor is this light a special revelation to myself—it is common to all who are born again. And thus, though you and I cannot fully agree about it—yet I almost daily meet with people, from the east, west, north, and south, whom, though I never saw them before, I find we understand each other at once. This (as you bid me be explicit) is the *one thing* which you at present lack. And I limited my expression to one thing, because it is our Lord's expression, and because that *one thing* includes many.

As I said before, I cannot give it to you—but the Lord can. And from the desire he has raised in your heart, I have a warm hope that he will. You place the whole stress of your inquiries upon *human reason*. I am far from discarding reason, when it is enlightened and sanctified; but spiritual things must be spiritually discerned, and can be received and discerned no other way; for to our natural reason they are foolishness; 1Co. 2:14-15; Mat. 11:25. This *certain something* I can no more describe to those who have not experienced it, than I could describe the taste of a pineapple to a person who had never

seen one. But Scriptural proofs might be adduced in abundance—yet not so as to give a solid conviction of it—*until* we actually experience it.

Thus it was with my friend, whose case I sent you. When God gave him *the key* (as he expressed it), then the Scriptures were unlocked. His wishing himself a Deist some time before, was not from any libertine exceptions he made to the precepts of the Gospel—but from the perplexing enigmas he had found, by endeavoring to understand the doctrines by *dint of reason*, though reason in him was as strong and penetrating as in most men I ever met with. Upon your present plan, how can I hope to satisfy you, though even Paul asserts it, that *the carnal mind is enmity against God*? You will readily agree with me to the proposition as it stands in Paul's words—but I think will not so readily assent to what I have no more doubt than of my own existence, is the sense of it—That the heart of man—of any man, every man, however apparently amiable in his outward conduct, however benevolent to his fellow-creatures, however abundant and zealous in his devotions—is, by nature, enmity against God. Not indeed against the idea he himself forms of God—but against the character which God has revealed of himself in the Scripture. Man is an enemy to the justice, sovereignty, and law of God; and to the one method of salvation, which he has appointed in the Gospel, by faith alone; by such a faith as it is no more in his power to contribute to the production of in himself, than he can contribute to raising the dead, or making a world. Whatever is of the flesh is flesh, and can rise no higher than its principle—But the Lord could convince you of this by a glance of thought.

But I must break off, for lack both of room and time. Let me remind you of our agreement, to use and allow the greatest freedom, and not to be offended with what is well-meant on either side. Something in

your last letter made me apprehensive you were a little displeased with me. He who knows my heart, knows that I wish you as well as my own soul.

The expression, of *atoning for disobedience by repentance*, was in one of your sermons. I considered it as unguarded; but, on my view of things, it were in a manner impossible I could use that expression, though perhaps too often unguarded myself.

I pray God to bless you in all your ways, and beg you to believe that I am, with sincerity, etc.

A letter to a young woman

My dear Miss _____,

I thank you for your letter, and for your kind sympathy with me; but I am not much to be pitied. My trial, if I may call it one, has been very light, and sweetened with innumerable comforts and mercies. I fell in the street, and was confined to the sofa for nearly two weeks. Last Sunday I was enabled to mount the pulpit, and I am now returning into my old track; but I cannot yet walk in the street, because I cannot wear my own shoe. I trust, in the Lord's good time, I shall recover my former liberty; and, until his time comes, which is always the best, I hope I shall not desire it. I felt little pain, except for about half an hour after my fall. Perhaps my confinement may have kept me from some greater harm.

The text of my first sermon on my return to church was suggested by my own case, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." John 5:14. Methinks it is applicable to you likewise. You have been sick, near unto death—but the Lord has raised you up—may he enable you to consider sin as the source and cause of every sorrow; and that the afflictions the Lord sends, however trying to the flesh, are light, compared with what sin deserves; and designed, if rightly improved, to prevent still worse things which may come upon us, if we despise the chastening of the Lord. It is my heart's desire for you, that you may not only say with gratitude, "He has healed all my sicknesses," but be able to add, "He has pardoned all my sin!"

An accomplished and well-behaved young woman is an amiable object in the sight of her fellow-creatures. She may be sensible and obliging; she may dress and dance genteelly; she may play well upon

the harpsichord; she may have much finer work to show than the coats and garments which Dorcas made; and, by her vivacity and good humor, she may become the idol of all her acquaintances; but, if she does not know her state as a sinner; if she admires herself, and is pleased with the admiration of others, while her heart is cold to the love and glory of God our Savior—if she has no taste for prayer or praise; if her mind is engrossed by the pleasures and prospects of this poor world—she is dead while she lives! In the sight of God her Maker, she is insensible and ungrateful, she is poor, blind, and miserable!

When you were a child, I could observe in you, not only the sprightliness common to children—but indications of sense and mental powers above the common standard. Your character, I suppose by now, is formed, your education finished, and your powers expanded. Happy are you, if, with these advantages, you should be led to devote yourself to the Lord in early life. Then He will guide and bless you, and make you a blessing in all your relationships. You will live honorably and usefully—and die, whether sooner or later, comfortably. You will have a double relish for every temporal comfort, because you will see His hand providing and bestowing it! And in times of trouble, which you will surely meet with, you will have a refuge, a hiding-place, a present and effectual Helper—when the help of man would be utterly in vain.

But, unless you enter the narrow way by the strait gate—all your talents and accomplishments will be snares to your feet, and thorns in your eyes! Though the world, at first, may appear like a beautiful palace, or a pleasant garden—it is enchanted ground—it is all illusion! And when, at last, the charm is broken—you will find yourself in a desolate wilderness. May the Lord preserve you from

those awful disappointments and bitter reflections, which are the inevitable consequences of living without God in the world!

Shall I advise you to change your own heart, to make yourself (what you must be if ever you are a Christian indeed) a new creature? This would be no less vain, than if I advised you to fly in the air, or to touch the stars with your finger! Yet there is something within the reach of your ability, and which if you neglect, the fault will be properly your own. This is, the use of what we call the *means of grace*. The promise of God has connected the appointed means and the promised end; so certainly, that no one, who carefully attends to the former, can possibly fail of attaining the latter. And no one, to whom the Lord's word of salvation is sent, shall finally miss of happiness, unless the appointed means of attaining it are willfully neglected. You can read—the Bible is in your hands—read it therefore attentively; by it God speaks to you, and he deserves to be heard. Your heart tells you that he ought to be worshiped. Let this conviction engage you to pray, and especially pray for the teaching of his Holy Spirit, to enlighten your mind to see and understand the great things of his Word. Reverence his public worship. Where two or three are met in his name, he has said, I am in the midst of them. Prize the preaching of the gospel when you can have it, for ordinarily faith comes by hearing. If you persevere in this way, you shall find that he is able and willing to do that for you—that which you cannot possibly do for yourself.

I commend you to the care and blessing of the Lord. I hope you will always believe me to be.

Your affectionate friend,
John Newton

Union with Christ

Dear Sir,

The union of a believer with Christ is so intimate, so unalterable, so rich in privilege, so powerful in influence, that it cannot be fully represented by any description or similitude taken from earthly things. The mind, like the sight, is incapable of apprehending a great object, without viewing it on different sides. To help our weakness, the nature of this union is illustrated, in the Scripture, by four comparisons, each throwing additional light on the subject, yet all falling short of the thing signified.

In our natural state, we are driven and tossed about, by the changing winds of opinion, and the waves of trouble, which hourly disturb and threaten us upon the uncertain sea of human life. But faith, uniting us to Christ, fixes us upon a sure foundation, the Rock of Ages, where we stand immovable, though storms and floods unite their force against us.

By nature we are separated from the divine life, as branches broken off, withered and fruitless. But grace, through faith, unites us to Christ the living Vine, from whom, as the root of all fullness, a constant supply of sap and influence is derived into each of his mystical branches, enabling them to bring forth fruit unto God, and to persevere and abound therein.

By nature we are hateful and abominable in the sight of a holy God, and full of enmity and hatred towards each other. By faith, uniting us to Christ, we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and joint communion among ourselves; even as the members of the same body

have each of them union, communion, and sympathy, with the head, and with their fellow-members.

In our natural estate, we were cast out naked and destitute, without pity, and without help, Ezek. 16:1-63; but faith, uniting us to Christ, interests us in his righteousness, his riches, and his honors. Our Redeemer is our husband; our debts are paid, our settlements secured, and our names changed.

Thus the Lord Jesus, in declaring himself the foundation, root, head, and husband, of his people, takes in all the ideas we can frame of an intimate, vital, and inseparable union. Yet all these fall short of truth; and he has given us one further similitude, of which we can by no means form a just conception until we shall be brought to see him as he is in his kingdom. John 27:21: "That they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us."

Well may we say, What has God wrought! How inviolable is the security, how inestimable the privilege, how inexpressible the happiness, of a believer! How greatly is he indebted to grace! He was once afar off, but he is brought near to God by the blood of Christ: he was once a child of wrath, but is now an heir of everlasting life. How strong then are his obligations to walk worthy of God, who has called him to his kingdom and glory!

Memoirs of John Newton

PREFACE

The memoirs of many are written at the particular request of their relations; but in publishing these of the late John Newton, I profess myself a volunteer; and my motives were the following: When I perceived my venerable friend bending under a weight of years, and considered how soon, from the very course of nature, the world must lose so valuable an instructor and example; when I reflected how common it is for hasty and inaccurate accounts of extraordinary characters to be obtruded on the public by debased writers, whenever more authentic documents are lacking above all; when I considered how striking a display such a life affords of the nature of true religion, of the *power of Divine grace*, of the mysterious but all-wise course of *Divine Providence*, and of the encouragement afforded for our dependence upon that Providence in the most trying circumstances— I say, on these accounts, I felt that the leading features of such a character of Mr. John Newton's should not be neglected, while it was easy to authenticate them correctly.

Besides which, I have observed a lack of books of a certain class for young people; and have often been inquired of by Christian parents for publications that might be interesting to their families, and yet tend to promote their best interests. The number, however, of this kind which I have seen, and which appeared helpful, is but small. For, as the characters and sentiments of some men become *moral blights* in society men, whose mouths seldom open but, like that of sepulchers, they reveal the putridity they contain, and infect more or less whoever ventures within their baneful influence; so the holy subject of these Memoirs was happily a remarkable instance of the reverse; the change that took place in his heart, after such a course of profligacy, affords a convincing demonstration of the truth and force of Christianity. Instead of proceeding as a *blight* in society, he became a *blessing*! His life was a striking example of the beneficial effects of the Gospel; and that not only from the *pulpit*, and by his

pen—but also by his conversation in the large circle of his acquaintances, of which there is yet living a multitude of witnesses.

Impressed, therefore, with the advantages which I conceived would result from the publication of these *Memoirs*, I communicated my design some years ago to Mr. Newton. Whatever tended to promote that cause in which his heart had been long engaged, I was sure would not fail to obtain his concurrence. He accordingly promised to afford whatever letters and materials might be necessary, beyond those which his printed "Narrative" contained. He promised also to read over and revise whatever was added from my own observation; and he soon after brought me an account in writing, containing everything memorial which he recollected before the commencement of his "Narrative." I shall, therefore, detain the reader no longer than to assure him that the whole of the following Memoirs (except what relates to Mr. Newton's character) was submitted to him in MS. while he was capable of correcting it, and that it received his sanction.

Richard Cecil, April, 1808.

MEMOIRS

These Memoirs seem naturally to commence with the Account mentioned in the Preface, and which I here transcribe.

"I was born in London the 24th of July, 1725. My parents, though not wealthy, were respectable. My *father* was many years master of a ship in the Mediterranean trade. In the year 1748 he went Governor of York Fort in Hudson's Bay, where he died in the year 1750.

"My *mother* was a *Dissenter*, a pious woman, and a member of the late Dr. Jennings's Church. She was weak and sickly in health; and loved retirement; and, as I was her only child, she made it the chief business and pleasure of her life to instruct me, and bring me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I have been told, that, from my birth, she had, in her mind, devoted me to the *Christian ministry*; and that, had she lived until I was of a proper age, I was to have been sent to Scotland to be educated. But the Lord had appointed otherwise. My mother died before I was seven years of age.

"I was rather of a sedentary turn, not active and playful, as boys commonly are—but seemed as willing to learn as my mother was to teach me. I had some mental capacity, and a retentive memory. When I was four years old, I could read (hard names excepted) as well as I can now; and could likewise repeat the answers to the questions in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, with the Scripture proofs; and all Isaac Watts' smaller Catechisms, and his Children's Hymns.

"When my father returned from sea, after my mother's death, he married again. My new mother was the daughter of a substantial grazier. She seemed willing to adopt and bring me up; but, after two or three years, she had a son of her own, who engrossed the old gentleman's notice. My father was a very sensible, and a moral man, as the world rates morality; but neither he nor my step-mother was under the impressions of genuine religion. I was therefore much left to myself—to mingle with idle and wicked boys—and soon learned their ways!

"I never was at school but about two years; from my eighth to my tenth year. It was a boarding-school, at Stratford, in Essex. Though

my father left me much to run about the streets—yet, when under his eye, he kept me at a great distance. I am persuaded he loved me—but he seemed not willing that I should know it. I was with him in a state of *fear* and *bondage*. His *sternness*, together with the severity of my schoolmaster, broke and overawed my spirit, and almost made me a dolt; so that part of the two years I was at school, instead of making a progress, I nearly forgot all that my good mother had taught me!

"The day I was *eleven* years old, I went on board my father's ship in Longreach. I made five voyages with him to the Mediterranean. In the course of the last voyage, he left me some months in Spain, with a merchant, a particular friend of his. With him I might have done well, if I had behaved well; but, by this time, my *sinful propensities* had gathered strength by habit! I was very *wicked*, and therefore very *foolish*; and, being my own worst enemy, I seemed determined that nobody should be my friend.

"My father left the sea in the year 1742. I made one voyage afterwards to Venice; and, soon after my return, was pressed into military service on board the *Harwich*. Then began my awfully mad career, as recorded in the 'Narrative;' to which, and to the 'Letters to a Wife,' I must refer you for any further dates and incidents."

John Newton, December 19, 1795

A few articles may be added to this account from the "Narrative," where we find that his pious mother stored his "memory with whole chapters, and smaller portions of Scripture, catechisms, hymns, and Christian poems; and often commended him with many prayers and tears to God." In his sixth year, he began to learn Latin, though the

intended plan of his education was soon broken. He lost his pious mother, July 11th, 1782.

We also find, that, after his father's second marriage, John was sent to the school above-mentioned; and, in the last of the two years he spent there, a new teacher came, who observed and suited his temper. He learned Latin, therefore, with great eagerness; and, before he was ten years old. But, by being pushed forward too fast, and not properly grounded (a method too common in inferior schools) he soon lost all he had learned.

In the next and most remarkable period of Mr. Newton's life, we must be conducted by the above-mentioned "Narrative". It has been observed, that, at eleven years of age, he was taken by his father to sea. His father was a man of remarkably good sense, and great knowledge of the world. He took much care of his son's morals—but could not supply a mother's part. The father had been educated at a Jesuit's College, near Seville in Spain; and had an air of such *distance* and *severity* in his carriage—as discouraged his son, who always was in fear when before him, which deprived him of that influence he might otherwise have had.

From this time to the year 1742, Mr. Newton made several voyages—but at considerable intervals. These intervals were chiefly spent in the country, excepting a few months in his fifteenth year, when he was placed, with a very advantageous prospect, at Spain, already mentioned.

About this period of his life, with a temper and conduct exceedingly vacillating, he was often disturbed with *religious convictions*; and, being from a child fond of reading, he met with Bennett's "Christian Oratory," and, though he understood little of it, the course of life it recommended appeared very desirable to him. He therefore began to

pray, to read the Scriptures, to keep a diary, and thought himself 'religious'; but soon became weary of it, and gave it up.

He then learned to *curse* and to *blaspheme*; and was *exceedingly wicked* when out of the view of his parents, though at so early a period.

Upon his being thrown from a horse near a dangerous hedge-row, his conscience suggested to him the dreadful consequences of appearing in such a wicked state before God. This put him, though but for a time, upon breaking off his profane practices; but the consequence of these struggles between *sin* and *conscience* was, that on every *relapse*—he sunk into still greater depths of wickedness! He was roused again, by the loss of a companion who had agreed to go with him one Sunday on board a 'man of war' ship. Mr. Newton *providentially coming too late*, the boat had gone without him, and had sunk, by which his companion and several others were drowned. He was exceedingly affected, at the funeral of this companion, to think that by the *delay of a few minutes* (which at the time occasioned him much anger) his life had been preserved; but this also was soon forgotten. The perusal of the "Family Instructor" produced another *temporary reformation*. In short, he took up and laid aside *a religious profession* three or four different times, before he was sixteen years of age.

"All this while," says he, "my heart was insincere. I often saw the necessity of religion, as a means of escaping hell; but I loved sin, and was unwilling to forsake it. I was so strangely blind and stupid, that, sometimes when I have been determined upon things which I knew were sinful, I could not go on quietly until I had first dispatched my ordinary task of prayer—in which I have grudged every moment of

the time! When this was finished, my *conscience* was in some measure pacified, and I could rush into folly with little remorse!"

But his last reform was the most remarkable. "Of this period," says he, "at least of some part of it, I may say, in the Apostle's words, '*After the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee!*' I did everything that might be expected from a person entirely ignorant of God's righteousness, and desirous to establish his own. I spent the greatest part of every day in reading the Scriptures, and in meditation and prayer. I fasted often; I even abstained from all animal food for three months; I would hardly answer a question for fear of speaking an idle word; I seemed to bemoan my former miscarriages very earnestly, and sometimes with tears. In short, I became an *Ascetic*, and endeavored, as far as my situation would permit, to renounce going into the world, that I might avoid temptation."

This reformation, it seems, continued for more than two years. But he adds, "it was a poor religion! It left me in many respects under the power of sin; and, so far as it prevailed, only tended to make me gloomy, stupid, unsociable, and useless."

That it was a poor religion, and quite unlike that which he afterwards possessed, will appear from what immediately follows—for, had it been taken up upon more Scriptural ground, and attended with that internal evidence and satisfaction which true religion only brings—he could not so soon have fallen a dupe to such an infidel writer as *Lord Shaftesbury*. It was at a little shop in Holland, that he first met a volume of Shaftesbury's "Characteristics." The infidel book, called by Shaftesbury a "Rhapsody," suited the romantic turn of his mind. Unaware of its tendency, he imagined he had found a *valuable guide*. This book was always in his hand, until he could nearly repeat the

whole "Rhapsody." Though it produced no immediate effect, it operated like a *slow poison*, and prepared the way for all that followed.

About the year 1742, his father, having lately come from a voyage, and not intending to return to sea, was contriving for John's *settlement* in the world. But, to settle a youth who had no spirit for business, who knew but little of men or things, who was of a *romantic turn*, and as he expressed it—a medley of religion, philosophy, and indolence, and quite averse to order—must prove a great difficulty.

At length a merchant in Liverpool, an intimate friend of his father, and afterwards a singular friend to the son, offered to send him for some years to Jamaica, and undertook the charge of his future welfare. This was consented to, and preparation made for the voyage, which was to leave the following week. In the meantime, he was sent by his father on some business to a place, a few miles beyond Maidstone, in Kent. But the journey, which was designed to last but three or four days, gave such a turn to his mind as roused him from his *habitual indolence*, and produced a series of important and interesting occurrences.

A few days before this intended journey, he received an invitation to visit some distant relations in Kent. They were particular friends of John's mother, who died at their house in Kent. But a coolness having taken place upon his father's second marriage, all fellowship between them had ceased. As his road lay within half a mile of their house, and he obtained his father's permission to call on them, he went there, and met with the kindest reception from these relatives. They had two daughters. It seems the elder sister, "Polly" had been intended, by both the mothers, for his future wife. Almost at first

sight of this girl, then under fourteen years of age, he was impressed with such an affection for her, as appears to have equaled all that the *writers of romance* have ever imagined.

"I soon lost," says he, "all sense of religion, and became deaf to the remonstrance's of conscience and prudence; but my loving regard for her was always the same; and I may, perhaps, venture to say, that none of the scenes of misery and wickedness I afterwards experienced ever banished her a single hour together, from my waking thoughts for the seven following years."

His heart being now riveted to a particular object, everything with which he was concerned appeared in a new light. He could not now bear the thought of living at such a distance as Jamaica for four or five years—and therefore determined not to go there! He dared not communicate with his father on this point; but, instead of three *days*, he staid three *weeks* in Kent, until the ship had sailed without him—and then he returned to London. His father, though highly displeased, became reconciled; and, in a little time, he sailed with a friend of his father, to Venice.

In this voyage, being a *common sailor*, and exposed to the company of His comrades—he began to relax from the *sobriety* which he had preserved, in some degree, for more than two years. Sometimes, pierced with convictions, he made a few faint efforts, as formerly, to stop. And, though not yet *absolutely profligate*, he has making large strides towards a *total apostasy from God*. At length he received a remarkable *check* by a **dream**, which made a very strong, though not abiding, impression upon his mind.

I shall relate this dream in his own words, referring to his "Narrative" those who wish to know his opinion of dreams, and his application of this one in particular to his own circumstances.

"In my **dream**—the scene presented to my imagination was the harbor of Venice, where we had lately been. I thought it was night, and my turn for 'watch' upon the deck; and that, as I was walking to and fro by myself, a person came to me (I do not remember from whence) and brought me a **ring**, with an express charge to keep it carefully; assuring me, that, while I preserved that ring, I would be happy and successful; but, if I lost or parted with it, I must expect nothing but trouble and misery. I accepted the present and the terms willingly, not in the least doubting my own care to preserve it, and highly satisfied to have my happiness *in my own keeping*.

"I was engaged in these thoughts, when a second person came to me, and, observing the ring on my finger, took occasion to ask me some questions concerning it. I readily told him its virtues; and his answer expressed a surprise at my *weakness*, in expecting such *effects* from a mere ring! He reasoned with me some time, upon the impossibility of the thing; and at length urged me, in direct terms, to throw it away. At first I was shocked at the proposal; but his insinuations prevailed. I began to reason and doubt, and at last plucked the ring off my finger, and dropped it over the ship's side into the water, which it had no sooner touched, than I saw, at the same instant, a terrible fire burst out from a range of mountains (a part of the Alps) which appeared at some distance behind the city of Venice. I saw the hills as distinct as if awake, and that they were all in flames!

"I perceived, too late, my folly; and my tempter, with an air of insult, informed me, that all the *mercy* which God had in reserve for me—was comprised in that ring, which I had willfully thrown away! I understood that I must now go with him to the burning mountains, and that all the flames which I saw, were kindled on my account. I trembled, and was in a great agony; so that it was surprising that I did not then awake; but my dream continued.

"And, when I thought myself upon me point of a constrained departure for the fiery mountains, and stood self-condemned, without plea or hope, suddenly, either a *third* person, or perhaps the *same* who brought the ring at first (I am not certain which), came to me, and demanded the cause of my grief. I told him the plain case, confessing that I had ruined myself willfully—and deserved no pity. He blamed my rashness, and asked if I would be wiser, supposing I had my ring again. I could hardly answer to this, for I thought it was gone beyond recall. I believe, indeed, I had not time to answer, before I saw this unexpected friend dive down under the water, just in the spot where I had dropped it; and he soon returned, bringing the ring with him! The moment that he came on board, the flames in the mountains were extinguished, and my seducer left me!

"Then was the *prey* taken from the hand of the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered. My fears were at an end, and with joy and gratitude I approached my kind deliverer to receive the ring again. But he refused to return it, and spoke to this effect: 'If you should be entrusted with this ring again, you would very soon bring yourself into the same distress; you are not able to keep it; but *I* will preserve it for you, and, whenever it is needful, will produce it in your behalf. Upon this I awoke, in a state of mind not to be described; I could hardly eat, or sleep, or transact my necessary business, for two or three days. But the impression of my dream soon wore off, and in a little time I totally forgot it; and I think it hardly occurred to my mind again until several years afterwards."

Nothing remarkable took place in the following part of that voyage. Mr. Newton returned home in December 1743; and, repeating his visit to *Kent*, protracted his stay in the same imprudent manner he had done before. This so disappointed his father's designs for his interest, as almost to induce him to disown his son! Before any

suitable employment offered again, this thoughtless son was conscripted by a lieutenant of the Harwich 'man of war', who immediately impressed and carried him on board. This was at a critical juncture, as the French fleets were hovering upon our coast. Here a new scene of life was presented; and, for about a month, much hardship endured. As a war was daily expected, his father was willing that John should remain in the navy, and procured him a recommendation to the captain, who sent him upon the quarter-deck as a *midshipman*. He might now have had ease and respect—had it not been for his unsettled mind and wild behavior. The companions he met with here, completed the ruin of his moral principles; though he affected to talk of virtue, and preserved some decency—yet his delight and habitual practice was wickedness.

His principal companion was a person of talents and regard—an expert and plausible infidel, whose zeal was equal to his address. "I have been told," says Mr. Newton, "that afterwards he was overtaken in a voyage from Lisbon in a violent storm; the vessel and people escaped—but a great wave broke on board, and swept him into eternity!" Being fond of this man's company, Mr. Newton aimed to display what smattering of reading he had; his companion, perceiving that Mr. Newton had not lost all the *restraints of conscience*, at first spoke in favor of religion; and, having gained Mr. Newton's confidence, and perceiving his attachment to the "Characteristics," he soon convinced his pupil that he had never understood that book. By objections and arguments, Mr. Newton's depraved heart was soon gained. He plunged into *infidelity* with all his spirit; and the hopes and comforts of the Gospel were renounced at the very time when every other comfort was about to fail.

In December, 1744, the Harwich was in the Downs, bound to the East Indies. The captain gave Mr. Newton permission to go on shore

for a day—but, with his usual thoughtlessness, and following the dictates of a restless passion, he went to take a last visit of the object with which he was so infatuated. On new year's day he returned to the ship. The captain was so highly displeased at this rash step, that it ever after occasioned the loss of his favor.

At length they sailed from Spithead, with a very large fleet. They put in to Torbay, with a change of wind—but sailed the next day on its becoming fair weather. Several of the fleet were lost at leaving the place—but the following night the whole fleet was greatly endangered upon the coast of Cornwall, by a storm from the southward. The ship on which Mr. Newton was aboard escaped unhurt, though several times in danger of being run down by other vessels—but many suffered much; this occasioned their going back to Plymouth.

While they lay at Plymouth, Mr. Newton heard that his father, who had a financial interest in some of the ships lately lost, had come down to Torbay. He thought that, if he could see his father, he might easily be introduced into a service, which would be better than pursuing a long and uncertain voyage to the East Indies. It was his habit in those unhappy days, never to deliberate. As soon as the thought occurred, he resolved to leave the ship at all events; he did so, and in the worst manner possible.

He was sent one day in the boat to prevent others from desertion—but betrayed his trust, and deserted himself. Not knowing which road to take, and fearing to inquire lest he should be suspected—yet having some general idea of the country, he found, after he had traveled some miles, that he was on the road to Dartmouth. That day and part of the next day, everything seemed to go on smoothly. He thought that he would reach his father in about a two hour walk—when he was met by a small party of soldiers, whom he could not

avoid or deceive; they brought him back to Plymouth, through the streets of which he proceeded guarded like a felon. Full of indignation, shame, and fear—he was confined two days in the guard-house; then sent on ship-board, and kept a while in irons; next he was publicly stripped and whipped, degraded from his office, and all his former companions forbidden to show him the least favor—or even to speak to him. As midshipman he had been entitled to command the ship, but being sufficiently haughty and vain, he was now brought down to a level with the lowest, and exposed to the insults of all. The state of his mind at this time, can only be properly expressed in his own words:

"As my *present* situation was uncomfortable, my *future* prospects were still worse; the evils I suffered were likely to grow heavier every day. While my catastrophe was recent, the officers and my fellow sailors were somewhat disposed to screen me from ill usage—but, during the little time I remained with them afterwards, I found them cool very fast in their endeavors to protect me. Indeed, they could not avoid such conduct without running a great risk of sharing punishment with me; for the captain, though in general a humane man, who behaved very well to the ship's company, was almost implacable in his resentment towards me, and took several occasions to show it! And the voyage was expected to be (as it proved) for five years! Yet nothing I either felt or feared distressed me so much as to see myself thus forcibly torn away from the *object of my affections*, under a great improbability of ever seeing her again, and a much greater improbability of returning in such a manner as would give me hope of seeing her become my wife.

"Thus I was as miserable on all sides—as could well be imagined. My heart was filled with the most excruciating passions: eager desire, bitter rage, and black despair!

"Every hour exposed me to some new insult and hardship, with no hope of relief or mitigation; no friend to take my part, nor to listen to my distress. Whether I looked inward or outward, I could perceive nothing but darkness and misery. I think no case, except that of a conscience wounded by the wrath of God, could be more dreadful than mine. I cannot express with what wishfulness and regret I cast my last looks upon the English shore; I kept my eyes fixed upon it, until, the ship's distance increasing, it insensibly disappeared. And, when I could see it no longer, I was tempted to throw myself into the sea, which (according to the wicked infidel system I had adopted) would put a end to all my sorrows at once. *But the secret hand of God restrained me!*"

During His passage to Madeira, Mr. Newton describes himself as a prey to the most gloomy thoughts. Though he had deserved all, and more than all the harsh treatment which he had met with from the captain—yet his pride suggested that he had been done a gross injustice. "And this so," says he, "wrought upon my bewitched heart, that I actually formed designs against the captain's life, and this was one reason which made me willing to prolong my own life. I was sometimes divided between the two. The Lord had now, to all appearance, given me up to judicial hardness of heart. I was capable of any wickedness. I had not the least fear of God before my eyes, nor (so far as I remember) the least sensibility of conscience. I was possessed with so strong a spirit of delusion, that I believed my own lie, and was firmly persuaded that after death—I should cease to be. Yet the Lord preserved me! Some intervals of sober reflection would at times take place; when I have chosen death rather than life—a ray of hope would come in (though there was little probability for such a hope) that I should yet *see better days*, that I might return to England, and have my wishes crowned, if I did not willfully throw myself away. In a word, my love to my dear "Polly" was now the only

restraint I had left; though I neither feared God nor regarded man, I could not bear that she should think meanly of me when I was dead."

Mr. Newton had now been at Madeira some time. The business of the fleet being completed, they were to sail the following day; on that memorable morning he happened to sleep late in bed, and would have continued to sleep—but that an old companion, a midshipman, came down, between jest and earnest—and bid him rise. As he did not immediately comply, the midshipman cut down the hammock in which he lay; this obliged him to dress himself; and, though very angry, he dared not resent it—but was little aware that this person, without design, was a special instrument of God's providence.

Mr. Newton said little—but went upon deck, where he saw a man putting his own clothes into a boat, and informed Mr. Newton he was going to leave the ship. Upon inquiry, he found that two men from a Guinea ship, which lay near them, had entered on board the Harwich, and that the commodore (the late, Sir George Pecoek) had ordered the captain to exchange two others in their place. Inflamed with this information, Mr. Newton requested that the boat be detained a few minutes; he then entreated the lieutenants to intercede with the captain that he might be dismissed upon this occasion. Though he had formerly behaved badly to these officer, they were moved with pity, and were disposed to serve him. The captain, who had refused to exchange him at Plymouth, though requested by Admiral Medley, was easily prevailed with now. In little more than half an hour from his being asleep in bed—he found himself discharged, and safely on board another ship; the events depending upon this change, will show it to have been the most critical and important.

The ship he now entered was bound to Sierra Leone, and the adjacent parts of what is called the Windward Coast of Africa. The commander knew his father, received him kindly, and made professions of assistance; and probably would have been his friend, if, instead of profiting by his former errors, he had not pursued a course, which if possible, was worse. He was under some restraint on board the Harwich—but, being now among strangers, he could *sin without disguise*.

"I well remember," says he, "that, while I was passing from one ship to the other, I rejoiced in the exchange, with this reflection, that I might now be as abandoned as I pleased, without any control. And, from this time, I was exceedingly vile indeed, little, if anything, short of that animated description of an almost irrecoverable state, which we have in 2 Peter 2:14 "With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!" I not only sinned with a high hand myself—but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion; nay, I eagerly sought occasion, sometimes to my own hazard and hurt."

By this conduct he soon forfeited the favor of his captain; for, besides being careless and disobedient, upon some *imagined affront*, he employed his mischievous wit in making a song to ridicule the captain—as to his ship, his designs, and his person; and he taught it to the whole ship's company!

He thus proceeded for about six months, at which time the ship was preparing to leave the coast—but, a few days before she sailed, the captain died. Mr. Newton was not upon much better terms with his mate, who succeeded to the command, and upon some occasion had treated him badly. He felt certain, that if he went in the ship to the

West Indies, the mate would have put him on board a man of war, a consequence more dreadful to him than death itself! To avoid this, he determined to remain in Africa, and pleased himself with imagining it would be an opportunity of improving his fortune.

Upon that part of the coast there were a few *white men* settled, whose business it was to purchase **slaves**, etc. and sell them to the ships at an higher price. One of these, who had first landed in circumstances similar to Mr. Newton's, had acquired considerable wealth. This man had been in England, and was returning in the same vessel with Mr. Newton, of which he owned a quarter part. His example impressed Mr. Newton with hopes of the same success; and he obtained his discharge upon condition of entering into the trader's service, to whose generosity he trusted without the precaution of terms. He received, however, no compensation for his time on board the ship—but a bill upon the owners in England; which, in consequence of their failure, was never paid; the day, therefore, on which the vessel sailed, he landed upon the island of Benanoes, like one shipwrecked, with little more than the clothes upon his back.

"The two following years," says he, "of which I am now to give some account, will seem as an absolute blank in my life—but, I have seen frequent cause since to admire the mercy of God in banishing me to those distant parts, and almost excluding me from all society, at a time when I was filled with evil and mischief; and, like one infected with a pestilence, was capable of spreading my infectious evil, wherever I went! But the Lord wisely placed me where I could do little harm. The few I had to converse with were too much like myself; and I was soon brought into such abject circumstances, that I was too low to have any influence. I was rather shunned and despised, than imitated; there being few even of the Negroes themselves, during the first year of my residence—but thought

themselves too good to speak to me. I was an outcast, ready to perish—but the Lord beheld me with mercy; he even now bid me to live; and I can only ascribe it to his secret upholding power, that what I suffered in this interval, did not bereave me either of my life or senses."

Mr. Newton's new master had resided near Cape Mount—but at this time had settled at the Plantanes, on the largest of the three islands. It is low and sandy, about two miles in circumference, and almost covered with palm-trees. They immediately began to build a house. Mr. Newton had some desire to retrieve his time and character, and might have lived tolerably well with his master, if this man had not been much under the direction of a black woman, who lived with him as a wife, and influenced him against his new servant. She was a person of some consequence in her own country, and he owed his first rise to her influence.

This woman, for reasons not known, was strangely prejudiced against Mr. Newton from the first. He also had unhappily a severe fit of illness, which attacked him before he had opportunity to show what he could or would do in the service of his master. Mr. Newton was sick when his master sailed to Rio Nuna, and was left in the hands of this cruel black woman. He was taken some care of at first—but, not soon recovering, her attention was wearied, and she entirely neglected him. Sometimes it was with difficulty he could procure a draught of cold water when burning with a fever! His bed was a mat, spread upon a board, with a log for his pillow. Upon His appetite returning, after the fever left him, he would gladly have eaten—but no one gave him any food. She lived in plenty—but scarcely allowed him sufficient to sustain life, except now and then, when in the highest good humor, she would send him scraps from her own plate after she had dined. And this (so greatly was he humbled) he

received with thanks and eagerness, as the most *needy beggar* does an alms.

"Once," says he, "I well remember, I was called to receive this bounty from her own hand—but, being exceedingly weak and feeble, I dropped the plate. Those who live in plenty can hardly conceive how this loss touched me—but she had the cruelty to laugh at my disappointment; and, though the table was covered with dishes (for she lived much in the European manner), she refused to give me any more. My distress has been at times so great, as to compel me to go by night, and pull up roots in the plantation (though at the risk of being punished as a thief), which I have eaten raw upon the spot, for fear of discovery. The roots I speak of are very wholesome food, when boiled or roasted—but as unfit to be eaten raw. The consequence of this diet, which, after the first experiment, I always expected, and seldom missed, was to make me vomit; so that I have often returned as empty as I went; yet necessity urged me to repeat the trial several times. I have sometimes been relieved by strangers; yes, even by the black slaves—who have secretly brought me victuals (for they dared not be seen to do it) from their own slender pittance. Next to abject poverty, nothing sits harder upon the mind than scorn and contempt, and of this likewise I had an abundant measure."

When slowly recovering, the same woman would sometimes pay Mr. Newton a visit; not to pity or relieve—but to *insult* him. She would call him worthless and indolent, and compel him to walk; which when he could scarcely do, she would set her attendants to mimic his motions, to clap their hands, laugh, throw limes at him, and sometimes they would even throw stones. But though her attendants were forced to join in this treatment, Mr. Newton was rather pitied than scorned, by the lowest of her slaves, on her departure.

When his master returned from the voyage, Mr. Newton complained of ill usage—but was not believed. And, as he complained in her hearing, he fared worse for it. He accompanied his master in his second voyage, and they agreed pretty well, until his master was persuaded by a another trader that Mr. Newton was dishonest. This seems to be the only vice with which he could not be charged; as his *honesty* seemed to be the last remains of a good education which he could now boast of. And though his great distress might have been a strong temptation to fraud, it seems he never once thought of defrauding his master in the smallest matter. The charge, however, was believed, and he was condemned without evidence. From that time he was treated very harshly; whenever his master left the vessel, he was locked upon deck with a pint of rice for his day's allowance, nor had he any relief until his master's return.

"Indeed," says he, "I believe I would have been nearly starved—but for an opportunity of catching fish sometimes. When fowls were killed for my master's own use, I seldom was allowed any part but the entrails, to bait my hooks with; and, at the changing of the tides, when the current was still, I used generally to fish, (at other times it was not practicable,) and I very often succeeded. If I saw a fish upon my hook, my joy was little less than any other person would have found in the accomplishment of the scheme he had most at heart. Such a fish, hastily broiled, or rather half burnt, without salt, sauce, or bread, has afforded me a delicious meal. If I caught none, I might, if I could, sleep away my hunger until the next return of low tide, and then try again.

"Nor did I suffer less from the inclemency of the weather, and the lack of clothes. The rainy season was now advancing; my whole wardrobe was a shirt, a pair of trowsers, a cotton handkerchief instead of a cap, and a cotton cloth about two yards long; and, thus

clothed, I have been exposed for twenty, thirty, perhaps near forty hours together, in incessant rains accompanied with strong gales of wind, without the least shelter, when my master was on shore. I feel to this day some faint returns of the violent pains I then contracted. The excessive cold and wet I endured in that voyage, and so soon after I had recovered from a long sickness, quite broke my constitution and my spirits; the latter were soon restored—but the effects of the former still remain with me, as a *needful memento of the service and the wages of sin.*"

In about two months they returned, and the rest of the time which Mr. Newton spent with his master was chiefly at the Plantanes, and under the same regimen as has been mentioned. His heart was now bowed down—but not at all to a wholesome repentance. While his spirits sunk, the language of the prodigal was far from him; destitute of resolution, and almost of all reflection, he had lost the fierceness which fired him when on board the Harwich, and rendered him capable of the most desperate attempts—but he was no further changed than a tiger tamed by hunger.

However strange it may appear, he attests it as a truth, that, though destitute both of food and clothing, and depressed beyond common wretchedness, he could sometimes collect his mind to mathematical studies. Having bought Barrow's Euclid at Plymouth, and it being the only volume he brought on shore, he used to take it to remote corners of the island, and draw his diagrams with a long stick upon the sand. "Thus," says he, "I often beguiled my sorrows, and almost forgot my feelings; and thus without any other assistance I made myself in a good measure master of the first six books of Euclid."

"With my staff, I passed this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." These words of Jacob might well affect Mr. Newton, when

remembering the days in which he was busied in planting some lime or lemon trees. The plants he put into the ground were no higher than a young gooseberry bush. His master and mistress, in passing the place, stopped a while to look at him; at length his master said, "Who knows but, by the time these trees grow up and bear fruit, you may go home to England, obtain the command of a ship, and return to reap the fruits of your labors? We see strange things sometimes happen."

"This," says Mr. Newton, "as he intended it, was a *cutting sarcasm*. I believe he thought it as probable that I should live to be king of Poland; yet it proved a prediction; and they (one of them at least) lived to see me return from England, in the capacity he had mentioned, and pluck some of the first limes from these very trees! How can I proceed in my story, until I raise a monument to the Divine goodness, by comparing the circumstances in which the Lord has since placed me, with what I was in at that time? Had you seen me, then go so pensive and solitary in the dead of night to wash my one shirt upon the rocks, and afterwards put it on wet, that it might dry upon my back while I slept; had you seen me so poor a figure, that when a ship's boat came to the island, shame often constrained me to hide myself in the woods, from the sight of strangers; especially, had you known that my conduct, principles, and heart—were still darker than my outward condition—how little would you have imagined, that one, who so fully answered to the description of the Apostle, "hateful and hating one another"—was reserved to be so peculiar an instance of the providential care and exuberant goodness of God! There was, at that time—but one earnest desire of my heart, which was not contrary and shocking both to religion and reason; that one desire, though my vile licentious life rendered me peculiarly unworthy of success, and though a thousand difficulties seemed to render it impossible, the Lord was pleased to gratify."

Things continued thus nearly twelve months. In this interval Mr. Newton wrote two or three times to his father, describing his condition, and desiring his assistance; at the same time signifying, that he had resolved not to return to England, unless his parent were pleased to send for him. His father applied to his friend at Liverpool, who gave orders accordingly, to a captain of his who was then fitting out for Sierra Leone.

Some time within the year, Mr. Newton obtained his master's consent to live with another trader, who dwelt upon the same island. This change was much to his advantage, as he was soon decently clothed, lived in plenty, was treated as a companion, and trusted with his effects to the amount of some thousand pounds. This man had several factories, and white servants in different places; particularly one in Kittam. Mr. Newton was soon appointed there, and had a share in the management of business, jointly with another servant. They lived as they pleased; business flourished; and their employer was satisfied.

"Here," says he, "I began to be wretch enough to think myself happy. There is a significant phrase frequently used in those parts, that such a *white* man is grown *black*. It does not intend an alteration of complexion—but *disposition*. I have known several, who, settling in Africa after the age of thirty or forty, have at that time of life, been gradually assimilated to the tempers, customs, and ceremonies of the natives, so far as to prefer that country to England; they have even become dupes to all the pretended charms, necromancies, amulets, and divination's of the blinded Negroes, and put more trust in such things, than the wiser sort among the natives. A part of this spirit of infatuation was growing upon me (in time, perhaps, I might have yielded to the whole); I entered into closer engagements with the inhabitants, and would have lived and died a wretch among them, if

the Lord had not watched over me for good. Not that I had lost those ideas which chiefly engaged my heart to England—but a despair of seeing them accomplished made me willing to remain where I was. I thought I could more easily bear the disappointment in this situation than nearer home. But, as soon as I had fixed *my* connections and plans with these views, the *Lord* providentially interposed to break them in pieces, and save me from ruin—in spite of myself!"

In the meantime, the ship that had orders to bring Mr. Newton home, arrived at Sierra Leone. The captain made inquiry for Mr. Newton there, and at the Benanas—but, finding he was at a great distance, thought no more about him. A special providence seems to have placed him at Kittam just at this time; for the ship coming no nearer than the Benanas, and staying but a few days, if he had been at the *Plantanes* he would not probably have heard of her until she had sailed; the same must have certainly been the event had he been sent to any other factory, of which his new master had several. But though the place he went to was a long way up a river, much more than a hundred miles distant from the *Plantanes*—yet he was still within a mile of the sea coast. The interposition was also more remarkable, as at that very juncture he was going in quest of trade, directly from the sea; and would have set out a day or two before—but that they waited for a few articles from the next ship that came, in order to complete the assortment of goods he was to take with him.

They used sometimes to walk to the beach, in hopes of seeing a vessel pass by—but this was very precarious, as at that time the place was not resorted to by ships of trade; many passed in the night, others kept a considerable distance from the shore; nor does he remember that any ship had ever stopped while he was there.

In Feb. 1747, his fellow-servant walking down to the beach in the forenoon, saw a vessel sailing by, and made a smoke-signal in token of trade. She was already beyond the place, and the wind being fair, the captain demurred about stopping; had Mr. Newton's companion been half an hour later, the vessel would have been beyond recall; when he saw her come to an anchor, he went on board in a canoe; and this proved the very ship already spoken of, which brought an order for Mr. Newton's return. One of the first questions the captain put was concerning Mr. Newton, and, understanding he was so near, the captain came on shore to deliver his message.

"Had," says he, "an *invitation* from home reached me when I was sick and starving at the Plantanes, I would have received it as the from the dead—but now, for the reasons already given, I heard it at first with indifference." The captain, however, unwilling to lose him, *framed a story*, and gave him a very plausible account of his having missed a large packet of letters and papers which he should have brought with him—but said he had it from his father's own mouth, as well as from his employer, that a person lately dead had left Mr. Newton 400 pounds per annum, and added, that, if embarrassed in his circumstances, he had express orders to redeem Mr. Newton though it should cost one half of his cargo. Every particular of this *story* was false.

But though his father's care and desire to see him was treated so lightly, and would have been insufficient alone to draw him from his retreat—yet the remembrance of Polly, the hopes of seeing her, and the possibility that his accepting this offer might once more put him in the way of gaining her hand, prevailed over all other considerations.

The captain further promised (and in this he kept his word) that Mr. Newton should lodge in his cabin, dine at his table, and be his companion, without being liable to service. Thus suddenly was he freed from a captivity of about fifteen months. He had neither a thought nor a desire of this change one hour before it took place—but, embarking with the captain, he in a few hours lost sight of his island residence.

The ship in which he embarked as a passenger was on a trading voyage for gold, ivory, wood, and bees' wax. Such a cargo requires more time to collect than one of slaves. The captain began his trade at Gambia, had been already four or five months in Africa; and during the course of a year after Mr. Newton had been with him, they ranged the whole coast as far as Cape Lopez, and more than a thousand miles further from England, than the place from whence he embarked.

"I have," says he, "little to offer worthy of notice in the course of this tedious voyage. I had no business to employ my thoughts—but sometimes amused myself with mathematics; excepting this, my whole life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness. I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer. Not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones; so that I was often seriously reprov'd by the captain, who was himself a very passionate man, and not at all moral in his speech. From the stories I told him of my past adventures, and what he saw of my conduct, and especially towards the close of the voyage, when we met with many disasters, he would often tell me, that, to his great grief, he had a *Jonah* on board; that a *curse* attended me wherever I went; and that all the troubles he met with in the voyage were owing to his having taken *me* into his vessel!"

Although Mr. Newton lived long in the excess of almost every other extravagance, he was never, it seems, fond of alcohol; his father was often heard to say, that while his son avoided drunkenness, some hopes might be entertained of his recovery. Sometimes, however, in a frolic, he would promote a drinking-bout; not through love of liquor—but disposition to mischief; the last proposal he made of this kind, and at his own expense, was in the river Gabon, while the ship was trading on the coast.

Four or five of them sat down one evening to try who could hold out longest in drinking whisky and rum alternately. A large sea-shell supplied the place of a glass. Mr. Newton was very unfit for such a challenge, as his head was always incapable of bearing much liquor; he began, however, and proposed as a toast, some imprecation against the person who should start first; this proved to be himself. Fired in his brain, he arose and danced on the deck like a madman, and while he was thus diverting his companions, his hat went overboard. He endeavored eagerly to throw himself over the side into the boat, that he might recover his hat. He was half overboard, and would, in the space of a moment, have plunged into the water; when somebody caught hold of his clothes and pulled him back. This was an amazing escape, as *he could not swim*, even if he had been sober; the tide ran very strong; his companions were too much intoxicated to save him, and the rest of the ship's company were asleep.

Another time, at Cape Lopez, before the ship left the coast, he went, with some others, into the woods, and shot a wild cow; they brought a part of it on board, and carefully marked the place (as he thought) where the rest was left. In the evening they returned to fetch it—but set out too late. Mr. Newton undertook to be their guide—but, night coming on before they could reach the place, they lost their way. Sometimes they were in swamps, and up to the waist in water; and

when they reached dry land, they could not tell whether they were proceeding towards the ship, or the contrary way. Every step increased their uncertainty, the night grew darker, and they were entangled in thick woods, which perhaps the foot of man had never trodden, and which abound with wild beasts; besides which, they had neither light, food, nor arms, while expecting a tiger to rush from behind every tree. The stars were clouded, and they had no compass whereby to form a judgment as to which way they were going. But it pleased God to secure them from the beasts; and after some hours of wandering, the moon arose, and pointed out the eastern quarter. It appeared then, that, instead of proceeding towards the sea, they had been penetrating into the country; at length, by the guidance of the moon, they made it back to the ship.

These, and many other deliverance's, produced at that time no beneficial effect. The admonitions of conscience, which from successive repulses had grown weaker and weaker, at length entirely ceased; and, for the space of many months, if not for some years, he had not a single *check* of that sort. At times he was visited with sickness, and believed himself to be near death—but had not the least concern about the consequences. "In a word," says he, "I seemed to have every mark of final impenitence and rejection; neither *judgments* nor *mercies* made the least impression on me."

At length, their business being finished, they left Cape Lopez and sailed homeward about the beginning of January, 1748. From there to England is perhaps more than seven thousand miles, if the circuits are included, which it is necessary to make on account of the trade-winds. They sailed first westward, until near the coast of Brazil; then northward, to the banks of Newfoundland, without meeting anything extraordinary. On these banks they stopped half a day to fish for cod; this was then chiefly for diversion, as they had provision enough, and

little expected that those fish (as it afterwards proved) would be all they would have to exist on. They left March 1st, with a hard gale of wind westerly, which pushed them fast homewards. By the length of this voyage, in a hot climate, the vessel was greatly out of repair, and very unfit to endure stormy weather. The sails and cordage were likewise very much worn; and many such circumstances concurred to render what followed imminently dangerous.

Among the few books they had on board was one by Thomas A Kempis; Mr. Newton carelessly took it up, as he had often done before, to pass away the time—but which he had read with the same indifference as if it were a romance novel. But, in reading it this time, a thought occurred: "What if these things should be true!" He could not bear the force of the inference, and therefore shut the book, concluding that, true or false, he must abide the consequences of his own choice; and put an end to these reflections by joining in the vain life which came in his way.

"But now," says he, "the Lord's time was come, and the conviction I was so unwilling to receive, was deeply impressed upon me by a dreadful dispensation."

He went to bed that night in his usual carnal security—but was awakened from a sound sleep by the force of a violent wave which crashed on board; so much of it came down as filled the cabin in which he lay with water. This alarm was followed by a cry from the deck, that the ship was sinking! He essayed to go upon deck—but was met upon the ladder by the captain, who desired him to bring a knife. On his returning to his cabin to get the knife, another person went up in his place, who was instantly washed overboard. They had no time to lament him, nor did they expect to survive him long, for the ship was filling with water very fast. The sea had torn away the upper

timbers on one side, and made it a mere wreck in a few minutes; so that it seems almost miraculous that any survived to relate the story. They had immediate recourse to the pumps—but the water increased against their efforts; some of them were set to bailing, though they had but eleven or twelve people to sustain this service. But, notwithstanding all they could do, the vessel was nearly full, and with a common cargo must have sunk—but, having a great quantity of bees'-wax and wood on board, which were lighter than water, and towards morning they were enabled to employ some means for safety. In about an hour's time, day began to break, and the wind abated; they expended most of their clothes and bedding to stop the leaks; over these they nailed pieces of boards; and, at last, the water within began to subside.

At the beginning of this scene, Mr. Newton was little affected; he pumped hard, and endeavored to animate himself and his companions. He told one of them, that in a few days this distress would serve for a subject over a glass of wine—but the man, being less hardened than himself, replied with tears, "No, it is too late now." About nine o'clock, being almost spent with cold and labor, Mr. Newton went to speak with the captain, and, as he was returning, said, almost without meaning, "If this will not do—the Lord have mercy upon us!" thus expressing, though with little reflection, his desire of mercy for the first time within the space of many years. Struck with his own words, it directly occurred to him, "What mercy can there be for me!"

He was, however, obliged to return to the pump, and there continued until noon, almost every passing wave breaking over his head, being, like the rest, secured by ropes, that they might not be washed away. He expected, indeed, that every time the vessel descended into the sea—she would rise no more; and though he dreaded death now, and

his heart foreboded the worst, if the Scriptures, which he had long opposed, were true; yet he was still but half convinced, and remained for a time in a sullen frame—a mixture of despair and impatience. He thought, "if the Christian religion were true—then he could not be forgiven;" and was therefore expecting, and almost at times wishing, to know the worst of it.

The following part of his "Narrative" will, I think, be best expressed in his own words; "The 21st of March, is a day much to be remembered by me, and I have never allowed to pass wholly unnoticed since the year 1748. On that day the Lord sent from on high, and delivered me out of deep waters. I continued at the pump from three in the morning until nearly noon, and then I could do no more. I went and lay down upon my bed, uncertain, and almost indifferent whether I should rise again. In an hour's time I was called; and, not being able to pump, I went to the helm, and steered the ship until midnight, excepting a small interval for refreshment. I had here leisure and convenient opportunity for reflection. I began to think of my former religious professions, the extraordinary turns of my life, the calls, warnings, and deliverances I had met with, the licentious course of my life, particularly my unparalleled effrontery in making the Gospel history (which I could not be sure was false, though I was not yet assured it was true) the constant subject of profane ridicule. I thought, allowing the Scripture premises, there never was or could be such a vile sinner as myself; and then, comparing the advantages I had broken through, I concluded at first, that my sins were too great to be forgiven. The Scripture, likewise, seemed to say the same; for I had formerly been well acquainted with the Bible, and many passages, upon this occasion, returned upon my memory; particularly those dreadful passages, Pro. 1:24-31; Hebrews 6:4-6; and 2 Pe. 2:20, which seemed so exactly to suit my case and character.

"Thus, as I have said, I waited with fear and impatience to receive my inevitable doom. Yet, though I had thoughts of this kind, they were exceeding faint and disproportionate; it was not until after (perhaps) several years that I had gained some clear views of the infinite righteousness and grace of Christ Jesus my Lord, that I had a deep and strong apprehension of my state by *nature* and *practice*; and, perhaps, until then, *I could not have borne the sight!* So wonderfully does the Lord proportion the discoveries of sin and grace; for he knows our frame, and that, if he were to put forth the greatness of his power, a poor sinner would be instantly overwhelmed, and crushed as a moth!

"But, to return—When I saw, beyond all probability, that there was still hope of respite, and heard, about six in the evening, that the ship was freed from water, a gleam of hope arose. I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favor. I began to pray; I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a *reconciled* God, and call him *Father*; my prayer was like the cry of the ravens, which yet the Lord does not disdain to hear. I now began to think of that Jesus whom I had so often derided; I recollected the particulars of his life, and of his death; a death for sins not his own—but, as I remembered, for the sake of those who, in their distress, would put their trust in him. And how I chiefly wanted evidence. The *comfortless principles of infidelity* were deeply riveted; and I rather wished, than believed these things were real facts. Please observe, that I collect the strain of the reasoning and exercises of my mind in one view—but I do not say that all this passed at one time. The great question now was, *how to obtain faith*. I speak not of an appropriating faith (of which I then knew neither the nature nor necessity)—but how I should gain an assurance that the *Scriptures* were of Divine inspiration, and a sufficient warrant for the exercise of trust and hope in God.

"One of the first helps I received (in consequence of a determination to examine the New Testament more carefully) was from Luke 11:13. I had been sensible, that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when, in reality, I did not believe his history—was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God—but here I found the Holy Spirit spoken of, who was to be communicated to those who asked. Upon this I reasoned thus; If this book is true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise. I have need of that very Spirit, by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask; I must therefore pray for Him; and, if it is of God, he will make good his own word. My purposes were strengthened by John 7:17. I concluded from thence, that, though I could not say from my heart that I believed the Gospel—yet I would, for the present, take it for granted; and that, by studying it in this light, I would be more and more confirmed in it.

"If what I am writing could be perused by our modern infidels, they would say (for I too well know their manner) that I was very desirous to persuade myself into this opinion. I confess I was; and so would they be, if the Lord should show them, as he was pleased to show me at that time—the absolute necessity of some expedient to interpose between a righteous God and a sinful soul; upon the Gospel scheme, I saw at least a possibility of hope—but, on every other side, I was surrounded with black, unfathomable despair."

The wind being now moderate, and the ship drawing near to its port, the ship's company began to recover from their consternation, though greatly alarmed by their circumstances. They found that the water having floated their moveables in the hold, all the casks of provisions had been beaten to pieces by the violent motion of the ship. On the other hand, their livestock had been washed overboard in the storm. In short, all the provisions they saved, except the fish

lately caught on the banks for amusement, and a little of the grain, which used to be given to the hogs, would have supported them but a week, and that at a scanty allowance. The sails, too, were mostly blown away; so that they advanced but slowly, even while the wind was fair. They imagined they were about a hundred leagues from land—but were in reality much further. Mr. Newton's leisure time was chiefly employed in reading, meditation on the Scriptures, and prayer for mercy and instruction.

Things continued thus for about four or five days, until they were awakened one morning by the joyful shouts of the watch upon deck, proclaiming the sight of land. The dawning was uncommonly beautiful; and the light, just sufficient to reveal distant objects, presented what seemed a mountainous coast, about twenty miles off, with two or three small islands; the whole appeared to be the north-west extremity of Ireland for which they were steering. They sincerely congratulated one another, having no doubt that if the wind continued, they would be in safety and plenty the next day. Their brandy, which was reduced to a little more than a pint, was, by the captain's orders, distributed among them; who added, "We shall soon have brandy enough!" They likewise ate up the remainder of their bread, and were in the condition of men suddenly reprieved from death.

But, while their hopes were thus excited, the mate sunk their spirits, by saying, in a graver tone, that he wished "it might prove land at last." If one of the common sailors had first said so, the rest would probably have beaten him. The expression, however, brought on warm debates, whether it was land or not—but the case was soon decided; for one of their fancied islands began to grow red from the approach of the sun. In a word, their *land* was nothing but *clouds*; and, in half an hour more, the whole appearance was dissipated.

Still, however, they cherished hope from the wind continuing fair—but of this hope they were soon deprived. That very day, their fair wind subsided into a calm; and, the next morning, the gale sprung up from the south-east, directly against them, and continued so for more than a two weeks afterwards. At this time the ship was so wrecked, that they were obliged to keep the wind always on the broken side, except when the weather was quite moderate; and were thus driven still further from their port in the north of Ireland, as far as Lewes, among the western isles of Scotland. Their station now was such, as deprived them of any hope of relief from other vessels. "It may indeed be questioned," says Mr. Newton "whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean at the same time of the year."

Provisions now began to fall short. The half of a salted cod was a day's subsistence for twelve people; they had no stronger liquor than water, no bread, hardly any clothes, and very cold weather. They had also incessant labor at the pumps, to keep the ship above water. Much labor and little food wasted them fast, and one man died under the hardship. Yet their *sufferings* were light when compared with their *fears*. Their bare allowance could continue but little longer; and a dreadful prospect appeared of their being either starved to death, or reduced to feed upon one another.

At this time Mr. Newton had a further trouble, peculiar to himself. The captain, whose temper was quite soured by distress, was hourly reproaching *him* as the sole cause of the calamity, and was confident that his being thrown overboard would be the only means of preserving them. The captain, indeed, did not intend to make the experiment—but "the continued repetition of this in my ears," says Mr. Newton, "gave me much uneasiness; especially as my conscience seconded his words; I thought it very probable, that all that had

befallen us—was on my account; that I was at last found out by the powerful hand of God, and condemned in my own breast."

While, however, they were thus proceeding, at a time when they were ready to give up all for lost, and despair appeared in every countenance, they began to conceive hope from the wind's shifting to the desired point, so as best to suit that broken part of the ship, which must be kept out of the water, and so gently to blow, as their few remaining sails could bear. And thus it continued at an unsettled time of the year, until they were once more called up to see land, and which was really such. They saw the island of Tory, and the next day anchored in Lough Swilly, in Ireland, on the 8th of April, just four weeks after the damage they had sustained from the sea. When they came into this port, their very last victuals were boiling in the pot, and before they had been there two hours, the wind, which seemed to have been providentially restrained until they were in a place of safety, began to blow with great violence; so that, if they had continued at sea that night, they must, in all human estimation, have gone to the bottom! "About this time," says Mr. Newton, "I began to know that there is a God, who hears and answers prayer!"

Memoirs Part 2

Mr. Newton's history is now brought to the time of his arrival in Ireland, in the year 1748; and the progress he had hitherto made in religion will be best related in His own words. I shall, therefore, take a longer extract than usual, because it is important to trace *the operation of real religion in the heart*. Speaking of the ship in which he lately sailed, he says,

"There were no people on board to whom I could open myself with freedom concerning the state of my soul; none from whom I could ask advice. As to books, I had a New Testament, Stanhope, already mentioned, and a volume of Beveridge's Sermons; one of which, upon our Lord's Passion, affected me much. In perusing the New Testament, I was struck with several passages, particularly that of the fig-tree, Luke 13; the case of Paul, 1 Tim 1; but particularly that of the Prodigal, Luke 15. I thought that had never been so nearly exemplified as by myself. And then the goodness of the father in receiving, nay, in running to meet such a son, and this intended only to illustrate the Lord's goodness to returning sinners. Such reflections gaining upon me, I continued much in prayer; I saw that the Lord had interposed so far to save me, and I hoped he would do more. Outward circumstances helped in this place to make me still more serious and earnest in crying to him who alone could relieve me; and sometimes I thought I could be content to die even for lack of food—just so that I might but die a believer.

"Thus far I was answered, that before we arrived in Ireland, I had a satisfactory evidence in my own mind of the *truth of the Gospel*, as considered in itself, and of its exact suitableness to answer all my needs. I saw, that, by the way it was pointed out, God might declare not his *mercy* only—but his *justice* also, in the pardon of sin—on account of the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ. My judgment at that time, embraced the sublime doctrine of *God manifest in the flesh*, reconciling the world unto himself. I had no idea of those *systems*, which allow the Savior no higher honor than that of an upper servant, or at the most of a demi-god. I stood in need of an *Almighty* Savior; and such a one I found described in the New Testament.

"Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvelous thing; I was no longer an infidel; I heartily renounced my former profaneness, and had taken up some right notions; was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the *undeserved mercy* I had received, in being *brought safely through so many dangers*. I was sorry for my past misspent life, and purposed an immediate reformation. I was quite freed from the habit of *swearing*, which seemed to have been as deeply rooted in me as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, *I was a new man!*

"But, though I cannot doubt that this change, so far as it prevailed, was wrought by the Spirit and power of God—yet still I was greatly *deficient* in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my *enormous sins*—but I was little aware of the *innate evils of my heart*. I had no apprehension of the spirituality and extent of the Law of God; or of the hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ; a continual dependence on him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength, and comfort—was a mystery of which I had as yet no knowledge. I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past—but depended chiefly upon *my own resolution* to do better for the time to come. I had no Christian friend or faithful minister to advise me that my *strength* was no more than my *righteousness*; and though I soon began to inquire for serious books—yet, not having spiritual discernment, I frequently made a wrong choice; and I was not brought in the way of evangelical preaching or conversation (except the few times when I heard—but understood not) for six years after this period. Those things the Lord was pleased to reveal to me gradually. I learned them, here a little and there a little, by my own painful experience, at a distance from the common means and ordinances, and in the midst of the same course of evil company and bad examples I had been conversant with for some time.

"From this period I could no more make a mock at sin, or jest with holy things; I no more questioned the truth of Scripture, and had a sense of the rebukes of conscience. Therefore I consider this as the beginning of my return to God, or rather of his return to me—but I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) until a considerable time afterwards."

While the ship was refitting at Lough Swilly, Mr. Newton went to Londonderry, where he soon recruited his health and strength. He was now a serious professor, went twice a day to the prayers at church, and determined to receive the sacrament the next opportunity. When the day came, he arose very early, was very earnest in his private devotions, and solemnly engaged himself to the Lord; not with a formal—but sincere surrender, and under a strong sense of the mercies which he lately received. Having, however, as yet but an imperfect knowledge of his own heart, and of the subtlety of Satan's temptations, he was afterwards seduced to forget the vows of God that were upon him. Yet he felt a peace and satisfaction in the ordinance of that day, to which he had hitherto been an utter stranger.

The next day he went on a shooting party, with the mayor of the city and some other gentlemen. As he was climbing up a steep bank, and pulling his gun in a perpendicular direction after him, it went off so near his face as to destroy the corner of his hat. The remark he makes on this ought not to be omitted; "Thus, when we think ourselves in the greatest safety, we are no less exposed to danger than when all the elements seem conspiring to destroy us! Divine providence, which is sufficient to deliver us in our utmost extremity, is equally necessary to our preservation in the most peaceful situation!"

During their stay in Ireland, Mr. Newton wrote home. The vessel he was in had not been heard of for eighteen months, and was given up for lost. His father had no expectation of hearing that his son was alive—but received his letter a few days before. He embarked from London to become governor of York Fort, in Hudson's Bay, where he died. He had intended to take his son with him, had he returned to England in time. Mr. Newton received two or three affectionate letters from his father; and hoped, that soon, he would have had the opportunity of asking his forgiveness for the pain his disobedience had occasioned—but the ship that was to have brought his father home, came without him. It appears he was seized with cramps while bathing, and was drowned before the ship arrived in the bay. Before his father's departure from England, he had paid a visit in Kent, and given his consent to the union that had been so long talked of.

Mr. Newton arrived at Liverpool the latter end of May 1748, about the same day that his father sailed from the Nore. He found, however, another father in the gentleman whose ship had brought him home. This friend received him with great tenderness, and the strongest assurances of assistance. For to this *instrument* of God's goodness, he felt he owed everything. "Yet," as Mr. Newton justly observes, "it would not have been in the power even of this friend to have served me effectually, if the Lord had not met me on my way home, as I have related. Until then I was like the man possessed with the *legion of demons*. No arguments, no persuasion, no views of self perseverance, no remembrance of the past, nor regard to the future, could have restrained me within the bounds of common prudence—but now I was, in some measure, *restored to my senses*."

This friend immediately offered Mr. Newton the command of a ship, which, upon mature consideration, he, for the present, declined. He prudently considered, that, hitherto, he had been unsettled and

careless; and, that he had better, therefore, make another voyage, and learn obedience, and acquire further experience in business, before he ventured to undertake such a charge. The mate of the vessel in which he came home was preferred to the command of a new ship, and Mr. Newton engaged to go in the station of *mate* with him.

There was something so peculiar in Mr. Newton's case, after this extraordinary deliverance, and because others in like circumstances might be tempted to despair, that I think it proper to make another extract from his "Narrative;" as such accounts cannot be well conveyed but in his own words.

"We must not make the *experience of others* in all respects—a rule to ourselves, nor our own a rule to others; yet these are common mistakes, and productive of many more. As to myself, every part of my case has been extraordinary; I have hardly met a single instance resembling it. Few, very few, have been recovered from such a dreadful state; and the few that have been thus favored, have generally passed through the most severe convictions; and, after the Lord has given them peace, their future lives have been usually more zealous, bright, and exemplary than others. Now, as, on the one hand, my convictions were very moderate, and far below what might have been expected from the dreadful review I had to make; so, on the other, my first beginnings in a religious course were as *faint* as can be well imagined.

I never knew that season alluded to, Jer. 2:2, Revelation 2:4, usually called the *time of the first love*. Who would not expect to hear, that, after such a wonderful and un hoped for deliverance as I had received, and after my eyes were in some measure enlightened to see things aright—that I would immediately cleave to the Lord and His

ways with full purpose of heart, and consult no more with flesh and blood? But, alas! it was far otherwise with me. I had learned to pray; I set some value upon the Word of God, and was no longer a *libertine*—*but my soul still cleaved to the dust.*

Soon after my departure from Liverpool, I began to intermit and grow slack in waiting upon the Lord; I grew vain and trifling in my conversation; and, though my heart smote me often—yet my *armor* was gone, and I declined fast. By the time we arrived at Guinea, I seemed to have forgotten all the Lord's mercies and my own promises; and was, profaneness excepted, almost as bad as before! The enemy prepared a train of temptations, and I became his easy prey; for about a month he lulled me asleep in a course of evil, of which, a few months before, I could not have supposed myself any longer capable. How much propriety is there in the Apostle's advice, *Take heed lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!"*

In this voyage Mr. Newton's business, while upon the coast, was to sail in the long-boat from place to place, in order to *purchase slaves*. The ship, at this time, was at Sierra Leone, and arriving at the *Plantanes*, the scene of his former captivity—everything he saw tended to remind him of his present ingratitude. He was now in easy circumstances, and courted by those who had once despised him. The lime-trees he had formerly planted were growing tall, and promised fruit upon his expected return with a ship of his own. Unaffected, however, with these things, he needed another providential interposition to rouse him; and, accordingly, he was visited with a violent fever, which broke the fatal chain, and once more brought him to himself. Alarmed at the prospect before him, he thought himself now summoned away to death. The dangers and deliverances through which he had passed his earnest prayers in

time of trouble, his solemn vows before the Lord at his table—and his ungrateful returns for all his goodness, were present, at once, to his mind. He began then to wish that he had sunk in the ocean when he first cried for mercy. For a short time, he concluded that the *door of hope* was quite shut. Weak, and almost delirious, he arose from his bed, crept to a retired part of the island, and here found a renewed liberty in prayer; daring to make no more *resolves*, he cast himself upon the Lord, to do with him as he should please. It does not appear that anything new was presented to his mind—but that, in general, he was enabled to hope and believe in a Crucified Savior.

After this, the burden was removed from his conscience; and not only his peace—but his health, was gradually restored when he returned to the ship; and, though subject to the effects and *conflicts* of indwelling sin—yet he was ever after delivered from its *power* and *dominion*.

During the eight months they were employed upon the coast, Mr. Newton's business exposed him to innumerable dangers, from burning suns, chilling dews; winds, rains, and thunderstorms, in an open boat; and, on shore, from long journeys through the woods; and from the natives, who in many places, are cruel, treacherous, and watchful of opportunities for mischief. Several boats, during this time, were sunk; several white men were poisoned; and, from his own boat, he buried six or seven people with fevers. When going on shore, or returning, he was more than once overtaken by the violence of the surf, and brought to land half dead, as he could not swim. Among a number of such escapes, which remained upon his memory, the following will mark the singular providence that was over him.

On finishing their trade, and being about to sail to the West Indies, the only service Mr. Newton had to perform in the boat was to assist in bringing the wood and water from the shore. They were then at Rio Cestors. He used to go into the river in the afternoon, with the sea-breeze, to procure his cargo in the evening, in order to return on board in the morning with the land-wind. Several of these little voyages he had made—but the boat was grown old, and almost unfit for use. This service, likewise, was almost completed. One day, having dined on board, he was preparing to return to the river as formerly; he had taken leave of the captain, received his orders, was ready in the boat, and just going to put off. In that instant the captain came up from the cabin, and called him on board again. Mr. Newton went, expecting further orders—but the captain said he had *taken it into his head* (as he phrased it) that Mr. Newton should remain that day in the ship, and accordingly ordered another man to go in his place. Mr. Newton was surprised at this, as the boat had never been sent away without him before. He asked the captain the reason of his resolution—but none was assigned, except, as above—and so he would have it. The boat, therefore, went without Mr. Newton—but returned no more; it sunk that night in the river; and the person who supplied Mr. Newton's place was drowned! Mr. Newton was much struck when news of the event was received the next morning. The captain himself, though quite a stranger to religion, even to the denying of a Particular Providence, could not help being affected—but declared that he had no other reason for countermanding Mr. Newton at that time—but that it came suddenly into his mind to detain him.

A short time after he was thus surprisingly preserved, they sailed for Antigua; and from thence to Charlestown, in South Carolina. In that place there were many serious people—but, at this time, Mr. Newton was little capable of availing himself of their society; supposing that

all who attended public worship were holy Christians, and that *whatever* was taught from the pulpit must be very good.

He had two or three opportunities, indeed, of hearing a minister of eminent character and gifts, whom, through struck with his manner, he did not rightly understand. Almost every day, when business would permit, he used to retire into the woods and fields (being his favorite oratories), and began to taste the delight of communion with God, in the exercises of prayer and praise; and yet so much inconsistency prevailed, that he frequently spent the evening in vain and worthless company. His relish, indeed, for *worldly diversions* was much weakened; and he was rather a *spectator* than a *sharer* in these pleasures—but he did not as yet see the necessity of absolutely relinquishing such society. It appears, that compliances of this sort, in his present circumstances, were owing rather to a *lack of light* than to any obstinate attachment. As he was kept from what he knew to be sinful, he had, for the most part, peace of conscience; and his strongest desires were towards the things of God. He did not as yet apprehend the force of that precept, *Abstain from all appearance of evil*—but he very often ventured upon the very brink of temptation. He did not break with the world at once, as might have been expected—but was gradually led to see the sin and folly of first one thing and then another, and, as such, to give them up.

They finished their voyage, and arrived in Liverpool. When the ship's affairs were settled, Mr. Newton went to London, and from thence he soon repaired to *Kent* to visit "Polly". More than seven years had now elapsed since his first visit. Yet, while he seemed abandoned to his passions, he was still guided, by a Hand that he knew not, to the accomplishment of His wishes. Every obstacle was now removed; he had renounced his former follies; his employment was established,

and friends on all sides consenting. Accordingly, their hands were joined in marriage on February the 1st, 1750.

"But, alas! " says he, "this mercy, which raised me to all I could ask or wish in a temporal view, and which ought to have been an animating motive to obedience and praise, had a contrary effect. I rested in the *gift*, and forgot the *Giver!* My poor narrow heart was satisfied. A cold and careless frame, as to spiritual things, took place, and gained ground daily. Happy for me, the season was advancing; and, in June, I received orders to go to Liverpool. This roused me from my dream; and I found the pains of absence and separation from Polly, to be fully proportioned to my preceding pleasure. He wrote to Polly from St. Alban's, and included a prayer. From his interleaved copy of his "*Letters to a wife*," I extract the following remarks on this letter.

"This prayer includes all that I at that time knew how to ask for; and had not the Lord given me more than I then knew how to ask or think—I would now be completely miserable. The prospect of this separation was terrible to me as death; to avoid it, I repeatedly purchased lottery tickets, thinking, 'Who knows but I may win a considerable prize, and be thereby saved from the necessity of going to sea?' Happy for me, the lottery which I then considered as luck, was at God's disposal. The money, which I could not with prudence have spared at the time, was lost; all my tickets proved blanks, though I attempted to bribe God, by promising to give a considerable part to the poor. But these blanks were truly prizes. God's mercy sent me to sea against my own will. To His blessing, and to my solitary sea-hours, I was indebted for all my temporal comforts and future hopes.

"He was pleased likewise to disappoint me by His providence of some money which I expected to receive on my marriage; so that,

excepting our apparel, when I sailed from Liverpool on my first voyage, the sum total of my worldly inventory was seventy pounds in *debt*. Through all my following voyage, my irregular and excessive affections were as thorns in my eyes, and often made my other blessings tasteless and insipid. But He, who does all things well, over-ruled this likewise for good; it became an occasion of quickening me in prayer, both for her and myself; it increased my indifference for company and amusement; it habituated me to a kind of voluntary self-denial, which I was afterwards taught to improve to a better purpose."

Mr. Newton sailed from Liverpool in August 1750, as commander of a good ship. He had now the control and care of thirty people; and he endeavored to treat there with humanity, and to set them a good example. [I have heard Mr. Newton observe, that, as the commander of a slave-ship he had a number of women under his absolute authority; and, knowing the danger of his situation on that account, he resolved to abstain from flesh in his food, and to drink nothing stronger than water, during the voyage; that, by abstemiousness, he might subdue every improper passion; and that, upon his setting sail, the sight of a certain point of land was the signal for his beginning a rule which he was enabled to keep.] He likewise established public worship, according to the Liturgy of the Church of England, officiating himself twice every Lord's day. He did not proceed further than this, while he continued in that occupation.

Having now much leisure, he prosecuted the study of Latin with good success. He remembered to take a Dictionary this voyage; and added Juvenal to Horace; and, for prose authors, chose Livy, Caesar, and Sallust. He was not aware of the mistake of beginning with such difficult writers—but, having heard Livy highly commended, he was resolved to understand him; he began with the first page, and made

it a rule not to proceed to a second until he understood the first. Often at a standstill—but seldom discouraged, here and there he found a few lines quite obstinate, and was forced to give them up, especially as his edition had no notes. Before, however, the close of that voyage, he informed us that he could, with a few exceptions, read Livy almost as readily as an English author. Other prose authors, he says, cost him but little trouble; as, in surmounting the former difficulty, he had mastered all in one. In short, in the space of two or three voyages, he became tolerably acquainted with the *best classics*. He read Terence, Virgil, several pieces of Cicero; and the modern classics, Buchanan, Erasmus, and Cassimir; and made some essays towards writing elegant Latin.

"But, by this time," he observes, "the Lord was pleased to draw me nearer to himself, and to give me a fuller view of the *Pearl of great price*—the inestimable *Treasure hidden in the field of the holy Scripture*; and, for the sake of this, I was made willing to part with all my newly acquired learning. I began to think that life was too short (especially my life) to admit of leisure time for such *elaborate trifling*. Neither poet nor historian could tell me a word of Jesus! And I therefore applied myself to those who could. The *classics* were at first restrained to one morning in the week, and at length laid aside."

This, his first voyage after his marriage, lasted the space of fourteen months, through various scenes of danger and difficulty—but nothing very remarkable occurred; and, after having seen many fall on his right hand and on his left—he was brought home in peace, on November 2, 1751. In the interval between his first and second voyage, he speaks of the use he found in keeping a sort of *diary*; of the unfavorable tendency of a *life of ease*, among his friends; and of the satisfaction of *his wishes* proving unfavorable to the progress of

grace. Upon the whole, however, he seems to have gained ground, and was led into further views of Christian doctrine and experience by Scougal's "Life of God in the Soul of Man," Hervey's "Meditations," and the "Life of Colonel Gardiner." He seems to have derived no advantages from the preaching he heard, or the Christian acquaintances he had made; and, though he could not live without prayer, he dared not propose it, even to his wife, until she first urged him to the social practice of it.

In a few months, the returning season called him abroad again; [Mr. Newton had had an unexpected call to London; and, on his return, when within a few miles of Liverpool, he mistook a quicksand pit for a pond, and, in attempting to water his horse, both the horse and the rider plunged in it overhead. He was afterwards told, that, near that time, three people had lost their lives by a mistake of the same kind.] and he sailed from Liverpool in a new ship, July 1752. "I never knew," says he, "sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion, than in my two last voyages to Guinea, when I was either almost secluded from society while on ship, or when on shore among the natives. I have wandered through the woods, reflecting on the singular goodness of the Lord to me, in a place where, perhaps, there was not a person who knew me for some thousand miles round.

In the course of this voyage, Mr. Newton was wonderfully preserved through many *unforeseen dangers*. At one time there was a conspiracy among his own people to become pirates, and take possession of the ship; when the plot was nearly ripe, they watched only for opportunity. Two of them were taken ill in one day, and one of them died; this suspended the affair, and opened a way to its discovery. The slaves on board frequently plotted insurrections; and were sometimes upon the very brink of one, when it was disclosed. When at a place called Mana, near Cape Mount, Mr. Newton

intended to go on shore the next morning to settle some business—but the surf of the sea ran so high, that he was afraid to attempt landing; he had often ventured at a worse time—but then feeling a *backwardness* which he could not account for—and he therefore returned to the ship without doing any business. He afterwards found, that, on the day he intended to land, a scandalous and groundless charge had been laid against him, which greatly threatened his honor and interest, both in Africa and England, and would perhaps have threatened his life had he landed; the person most concerned in this affair owed him about a hundred pounds, which he sent in a huff; and otherwise, perhaps, would not have paid it at all; Mr. Newton heard no more of this accusation until the next voyage; and then it was publicly acknowledged to have been a malicious calumny, without the least shadow of foundation.

But as these things did not occur every day, Mr. Newton became very regular in the management of his time. He allotted about eight hours to sleep and meals, eight hours to spiritual exercise and devotion, and eight hours to his books; and thus, by diversifying his engagements, the whole day was agreeably filled up.

From the coast he went to St. Christopher's, where he met with a great disappointment; for the letters which he expected from Polly were, by mistake, forwarded to Antigua. Certain of her punctuality in writing, if alive, he concluded, by not hearing from her, that she was surely dead. This fear deprived him of his appetite and rest, and caused an incessant pain in his stomach; and, in the space of three weeks, he was nearly sinking under the weight of this imaginary trial. "I felt," says he, "some severe symptoms of that mixture of pride and madness, commonly called a *broken heart*; and, indeed, I wonder that this case is not more common. How often do the *potsherd*s of *the earth* presume to contend with their *Maker*; and what a wonder

and mercy it is—that they are not all broken! This was a sharp lesson—but I hope it did me good; and, when I had thus suffered some weeks, I thought of sending a small vessel to Antigua. I did so, and it brought me back several letters from Polly, which restored my health and peace, and gave me a strong contrast of the Lord's goodness to me, and of my unbelief and ingratitude towards him."

In August, 1753, Mr. Newton returned to Liverpool. After that voyage, he continued only six weeks at home; and, in that space, nothing very memorable occurred.

We now follow Mr. Newton in his *third voyage to Guinea*. It seems to be the shortest of any that he had made; and is principally marked by an account of a young man who had formerly been a midshipman, and his intimate companion on board the Harwich. This youth, at the time Mr. Newton first knew him, was sober—but Mr. Newton deeply infected with his then libertine principles! They met at Liverpool, and renewed their former acquaintance. As their conversation frequently turned upon religion, Mr. Newton was very desirous to recover his companion. He gave him a plain account of the manner and reasons of his own change, and every argument to induce him to relinquish his in fidelity.

When pressed very close, his usual reply was, that *Mr. Newton was the person who had taught him his libertine principles*. This naturally occasioned many mournful reflections in the mind of Mr. Newton. This person was going master to Guinea himself—but, meeting with disappointment, Mr. Newton offered to take him as a companion, with a view of assisting him in gaining future employment—but, principally, that his *arguments, example, and prayers* might be attended with good effect.

But his companion was exceedingly profane; grew worse and worse; and presented a distressing picture, continually before Mr. Newton's eyes, of what he himself had once been! Besides this, the man was not only deaf to remonstrance himself—but labored to counteract Mr. Newton's influence upon others; his spirit and passions were likewise so exceedingly high, that it required all Mr. Newton's prudence and authority to hold him in any degree of restraint. At length Mr. Newton had an opportunity of buying a small vessel, which he supplied with a cargo from his own ship. He gave his companion the command of it, and sent him away to trade on the ship's account.

When they parted, Mr. Newton repeated and enforced his best advice; it seemed greatly to affect his companion at the time—but, when he found himself released from the restraint of Mr. Newton, he gave loose to every vile appetite; and his violent irregularities, joined to the heat of the climate, soon threw him into a malignant fever, which carried him off dead in a few days. He seems to have died *convinced*—but *not converted*; his rage and despair struck those who were about him with horror; and he pronounced *his own fatal doom* before he expired, without any sign that he either hoped or asked for mercy. I hope the reader will deem the features of this dreadful case, though a digression from the principal subject, too instructive to be omitted.

Mr. Newton left the coast in about four months, and sailed for St. Christopher's. Hitherto he had enjoyed a perfect and equal state of health in different climates for several years—but, in this passage, he was visited with a fever, which gave him a very near prospect of eternity. He was, however, supported in a silent composure of spirit, by the faith of Jesus; and found great relief from those words, *He is able to save to the uttermost!* He was for a while troubled, either by a

temptation or by the fever disordering his faculties, that he should be lost or overlooked amidst the myriads that are continually entering the unseen world—but the recollection of that Scripture, *The Lord knows those who are his*, put an end to his doubts. After a few days he began to mend; and, by the time they arrived in the West Indies, he was perfectly recovered.

In this way he was led, for about the space of six years. He had learned something of the *evil of his heart*, had read the Bible over and over, had perused several Christian books, and had a general view of Gospel Truth—but his conceptions still remained *confused* in many respects; not having, in all this time, met with one acquaintance qualified to assist his inquiries.

On his arrival at St. Christopher's, he found a captain of a ship from London, a man of experience in the things of God. For nearly a month, they spent every evening together on board each other's ship alternately; prolonging their visits until near day-break. While Mr. Newton was an eager recipient, his companion's discourse not only informed his understanding—but inflamed his heart, encouraged him in attempting social prayer, taught him the advantage of Christian converse, and put him upon an attempt to make his profession more public, and to venture to speak for God. His conceptions now became more clear and evangelical; he was delivered from a fear, which had long troubled him, of relapsing into his former apostasy; and taught to expect *preservation*, not from his *own* power and holiness—but from the power and promise of God.

From this friend he likewise received a general view of *the present state of religion*, and of the prevailing errors and controversies of the times; and a direction where to inquire, in London, for further instruction. Mr. Newton's passage homewards gave him leisure time

to digest what he had received. He arrived safely at Liverpool, August, 1754 In a note in a letter from sea, in the interleaved copy of his "Letters to a Wife," before-mentioned, Mr. Newton remarks: "I now enter my 70th year. Still God are singularly bountiful to me; still I have reason to think myself favored as to externals beyond the common lot of mortals. God has upheld me. The best part of my childhood and youth was vanity and folly—but, before I attained the age of man, I became exceeding vile indeed; and was seated in the chair of the scorner, in early life. The troubles and miseries I for a time endured were my own. I brought them upon myself, by forsaking God's good and pleasant paths; and choosing the ways of transgressors, which I found very hard; they led to slavery, contempt, famine and despair!

"But my recovery from that dreadful state was wholly of God. God prepared the means, unthought of and undesired by me. How providential were the circumstances upon which my delivery from Africa depended! Had the ship passed one quarter of an hour sooner, I would have *died* there a wretch, as I had *lived*. But God heard and pitied my first lispings in prayer, at the time the storm fell upon the. He preserved me from sinking and starving. Thus I returned home; and He provided me friends, when I was destitute and a stranger.

His stay at home, however, was intended to be but short; and, by the beginning of November, he was ready again for sea. But the Lord saw fit to over-rule his design. It seems, from the account he gives, that he had not had the least scruple as to the *lawfulness of the Slave Trade*; he considered it as the appointment of Providence; he viewed this employment as respectable and profitable; yet he could not help regarding himself as a sort of jailer; and was sometimes shocked with an employment so conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles. On this account he had often prayed that he might be fixed in a more

humane profession; where he might enjoy more frequent communion with the people and ordinances of God, and be freed from those long domestic separations which he found it so hard to bear. His prayers were now answered, though in an unexpected way.

Mr. Newton was within two days of sailing, and in apparent good health—but, as he was one afternoon drinking tea with Polly, he was seized with a fit, which deprived him of sense and motion. When he had recovered from this fit, which lasted about an hour, it left a pain and numbness in his head, which continued with such symptoms as induced the physicians to judge it would not be safe for him to proceed on the voyage. By the advice of a friend, therefore, to whom the ship belonged, he resigned the command on the day before she sailed; and thus he was not only freed from that service—but from the future consequences of a voyage which proved extremely calamitous. The person who went in his place died; as did most of the officers, and many of the crew.

As Mr. Newton was now disengaged from business, he left Liverpool, and spent most of the following year in London, or in Kent. Here he entered upon anew trial, in a disorder that was brought upon Polly from the shock she received in his late illness; as he grew better, she became worse, with a disorder which the physicians could not define, nor medicines remove. Mr. Newton was therefore placed for about eleven months in what Dr. Young calls the dreadful post of observation, darker every hour.

The reader will recollect that Mr. Newton's friend at St. Christopher's had given him information for forming a religious acquaintance in London; in consequence of this he became intimate with several people eminent for that character; and profited by the spiritual advantages which a great city affords, with respect to the means of

grace. When he was in Kent, His advantages were of a different kind; most of his time he passed in the fields and woods. "It has been my custom," says he, "for many years, to perform my devotional exercises when I have opportunity; and I always find these scenes have some tendency both to refresh and compose my spirits. A beautiful, diversified prospect gladdens my heart. When I am withdrawn from the noise and petty works of men, I consider myself as in the great temple which the Lord has built for his own honor."

During this time he had to weather two trials, the principal of which was Polly's illness; she still grew worse, and he had daily more reason to fear that hour of separation which appeared to be at hand. He had likewise to obtain some future employment; the African trade was over-done that year; and his friends did not care to fit out another ship until that, which had been his, returned. Though a provision of food and clothing had seldom been with him a cause of great solicitude—yet he was some time in suspense on this account—but, in August following, he received a letter, informing him that he was nominated to a post which afforded him a competency, both unsought and unexpected. When he had gained this point, his distress respecting Polly was doubled; he was obliged to leave her in the greatest extremity of pain and illness, and when he had no hope that he should see her again alive; he was, however, enabled to resign her and himself to the Divine disposal; and, soon after he was gone, she began to amend; and recovered so fast, that, in about two months, he had the pleasure to meet her on her journey to Liverpool.

From October 1755, he appears to have been comfortably settled at Liverpool, and mentions his having received, since the year 1757, much profit from his acquaintance in the West Riding of Yorkshire. "I have conversed," says he, "at large among all parties, without joining any; and, in my attempts to hit the "golden mean", I have

been sometimes drawn too near the different extremes; yet the Lord has enabled me to profit by my mistakes," Being at length placed in a settled habitation, and finding his business would afford him much leisure, he considered in what manner he could improve it. Having determined, with the Apostle, "to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified," he devoted His life to the prosecution of spiritual knowledge, and resolved to peruse nothing but in subservience to this design. But, as what follows will appear most natural, and must be best expressed, in his own words, I shall transcribe them from the conclusion of his "Narrative."

"This resolution," says Mr. Newton, "divorced me (as I have already hinted) from my studies in the *classics* and *mathematics*. My first attempt was to learn so much Greek as would enable me to understand the New Testament and Septuagint; and, when I had made some progress this way, I entered upon the Hebrew the following year; and, two years afterwards, having surmised some advantages from the Syriac Version, I began with that language. You must not think that I have attained, or ever aimed at, a critical skill in any of these; I had no business with them—but as in reference to something else. I never read one classic author in the Greek; I thought it too late in life to take such a round in this language as I had done in the Latin; I only wanted the signification of Scriptural words and phrases; and for this I thought I might avail myself of others, who had sustained the drudgery before me. In the Hebrew, I can read the Historical Books and Psalms with tolerable ease—but, in the Prophetical and difficult parts, I am frequently obliged to have recourse to Lexicons, etc. However, I know so much as to be able, with such helps as are at hand, to judge for myself the meaning of any passage I have occasion to consult.

"Together with these studies, I have kept up a course of reading the best writers in divinity that have come to my hand, in the Latin and English tongues, and some French, for I picked up the French at times, while I used the sea. But, within these two or three years, I have accustomed myself chiefly to writing, and *have not found time to read many books besides the Scriptures.*

"I am the more particular in this account, as my case has been something singular; for, in all my literary attempts, I have been obliged to strike out my own path by the light I could acquire from books; as I have not had a teacher or assistant since I was ten years of age.

"One word concerning my views to the ministry—and I am done. I have told you, that this was my dear mother's hope concerning me—but her death, and the scenes of life in which I afterwards engaged, seemed to cut off the probability. The first desires of this sort in my own mind arose many years ago, from a reflection on Galatians 1:23-24. I could but wish for such a public opportunity to testify the riches of Divine grace. I thought I was, above most living, a fit person to proclaim that faithful saying, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners;" and, as my life had been full of remarkable turns, and I seemed selected to show what the Lord could do. I was in some hopes that perhaps, sooner or later, he might call me into his service.

"I believe it was a distant hope of this, that determined me to study the original Scriptures—but it remained an imperfect desire in my own breast, until it was recommended to me by some Christian friends. I startled at the thought when first seriously proposed to me—but, afterwards, set apart some weeks to consider the case, to consult my friends, and to entreat the Lord's direction. The judgment

of my friends, and many things that occurred, tended to engage me. My first thought was to join with the *Dissenters*, from a presumption that I could not honestly make the required subscriptions. But Mr. C —, in a conversation upon these points, moderated my scruples; and, referring the Established Church in some respects, I accepted a title from him, some months afterwards, and solicited ordination from the late Archbishop of York. I need not tell you I met a *refusal*, nor what steps I took afterwards to succeed elsewhere. At present, I desist from any applications. My desire to serve the Lord is not weakened—but *I am not so hasty to push myself forward* as I was formerly. It is sufficient that God knows how to dispose of me, and that he both can and will, do what is best. To him I commend myself; I trust that his will and my true interest are inseparable. To his name be glory forever; and with this I conclude my story."

A variety of remarks occurred to me while abridging the "Narrative;" but I refrained from putting them down, lest, by interrupting its course, and breaking the thread of the history, I should rather disgust, than profit the reader. I have heard Mr. Newton relate a few additional particulars—but they were of too little interest to be inserted here; they went, however, like natural incidents, to a further authentication of the above account, had it needed any other confirmation than the solemn declaration of the pious relator. Romantic relations, indeed, of unprincipled travelers, which appear to have no better basis than a disposition to amuse credulity to exhibit vanity, or to acquire gain, may naturally raise suspicion, and produce but a momentary effect at most on the mind of the reader—but facts, like the present, manifest such a display of the *power*, *providence*, and *grace* of God; and, at the same time, such a deep and humbling view of human depravity, when moved and brought forth by circumstances, as inexperience can scarcely credit—but

which must arrest the eye of pious contemplation, and open a new world of wonders.

I must now attempt to conduct the reader, without the help of Mr. Newton's "Narrative," finished February 2, 1763; to which, as I have already observed, he referred me for the former and most singular part of his life. When I left the above account with him for revision, he expressed full satisfaction as to all the facts related—but said, he thought I had been too minute even in the abridgment, since the "Narrative" itself had been long before the public. I remarked, in reply, that the "Narrative" contained a great variety of facts; that these Memoirs might fall into the hands of people who had not seen the "Narrative" but that, without some abridgment of it, no clear view could be formed of the peculiarity of his whole dispensation and character; and, therefore, that such an abridgment appeared to be absolutely necessary, and that he had recommended it at my first undertaking the work. With these reasons he was well satisfied. I now proceed to the remaining, though less remarkable, part of his life.

Mr. Manesty, who had long been a faithful and generous friend of Mr. Newton, having procured him the place of tide-surveyor in the port of Liverpool, Mr. Newton gives the following account of it; "I entered upon business yesterday. I find my duty is to attend the tides one week, and visit the ships that arrive, and such as are in the river; and the other week to inspect the vessels in the docks; and thus, alternately, the year round. The latter is little more than minimal effort—but the former requires pretty constant attendance, both by day and night. I have a good office, with fire and candle, and fifty or sixty people under my direction; with a handsome six-oared boat and a coxswain, to row me about in form."

We cannot wonder that Mr. Newton latterly retained a strong impression of a *Particular Providence*, superintending and conducting the steps of man; since he was so often reminded of it in his own history. The following occurrence is one of many instances; Mr. Newton after his conversion, was remarkable for his punctuality; I remember his often sitting with his watch in his hand, lest he should fail in keeping his next engagement. This exactness with respect to time, it seems, was his habit while occupying his post at Liverpool. One day, however, some business had so detained him, that he came to his boat much later than usual, to the surprise of those who had observed his former punctuality he went out in the boat, as heretofore, to inspect a ship—but the *ship blew up* just before he reached her. It appears, that, if he had left the shore a few minutes sooner, he must have perished with the rest on board.

This anecdote I had from a clergyman, upon whose word I can depend; who had been long in intimate habits with Mr. Newton, and who had it from Mr. Newton himself; the reason of its not appearing in his letters from Liverpool to Polly I can only suppose to be, his fearing to alarm her with respect to the dangers of his station.

But another providential occurrence, which he mentions in those letters, I shall transcribe. "When I think of my settlement here, and the manner of it, I see the appointment of Providence so good and gracious, and such a plain answer to my poor prayers, that I cannot but wonder and adore. I think I have not yet told you, that my immediate predecessor in office, Mr. C., had not the least intention of resigning his place on the occasion of his father's death; though such a report was spread about the town without his knowledge. or rather in defiance of all he could say to contradict it. Yet to this false report I owe my situation. For it put Mr. M. upon an application to Mr. S. the member for the town; and, the very day he received the

promise in my favor, Mr. C. was found dead in his bed; though he had been in company, and in perfect health, the night before. If I mistake not, the same messenger, who brought the promise, carried back the news of the vacancy, to Mr. S. at Chester. About an hour after, the mayor applied for a nephew of his—but, though it was only an hour or two, he was too late. Mr. S. had already written, and sent off the letter, and I was appointed accordingly. These circumstances appeared to me extraordinary, though of a piece with many other parts of *my singular history*. And the more so, as, by another mistake, I missed the land-waiter's place, which was my first object, and which, I now see, would not have suited us nearly so well. I thank God, I can now look through instruments and second causes—and see his wisdom and goodness immediately concerned in fixing my lot."

Mr. Newton having expressed, near the end of his "Narrative," the motives which induced him to aim at a regular appointment to the ministry in the Church of England, and of the disappointment he met with in His first making the attempt, the reader is further informed, that, on December 16, 1758, Mr. Newton received a title to a curacy from the Mr. C., and applied to the Archbishop of York, Dr. Gilbert, for ordination. The Bishop of Chester, having countersigned his testimonials, directed him to Dr. Newton, the Archbishop's Chaplain. He was referred to the Secretary, and received the softest refusal imaginable. The Secretary informed him, that he had "presented the matter to the Archbishop—but he was inflexible in supporting the Rules and Canons of the church, etc."

Mr. Newton, it seems, had made some small attempts at Liverpool, in a way of preaching or expounding. Many wished him to engage more at large in those ministerial employments to which his own mind was inclined; and he thus expresses his motives in a letter to

Polly, in answer to the objections she had formed. "The late death of Mr. Jones, of St. Savior's, has pressed this concern more closely upon my mind. I fear it must be wrong, after having so solemnly devoted myself to the Lord for his service, to wear away my time, and bury my talents in silence (because I had been refused orders in the Church), after all the great things he has done for me."

In a note annexed, he observes, that the influence of his judicious and affectionate counselor moderated the zeal which dictated this letter, written in the year 1762; that, had it not been for her, he would probably have been precluded from those important scenes of service, to which he was afterwards appointed—but he adds, "The exercises of my mind upon this point, I believe, have not been peculiar to myself. I have known several people, sensible, pious, of competent abilities, and cordially attached to the Established Church; who, being wearied out with repeated refusals of ordination, and, perhaps, not having the advantage of such an adviser as I had, have at length struck into the *itinerant path*, or settled among the *Dissenters*. Some of these—yet living, are men of respectable characters, and useful in their ministry—but their influence, which would once have been serviceable to the true interests of the Church of England, now rather operates against it."

In the year 1764, Mr. Newton had the curacy of Olney proposed to him, and was recommended by Lord D. to Dr. Green, Bishop of Lincoln; of whose candor and tenderness he speaks with much respect. The Bishop had admitted him as a candidate for orders. "The examination," says he, "lasted about an hour, chiefly upon the principal heads of divinity. As I was resolved not to be charged hereafter with dissimulation, I was constrained to differ from his lordship in some points—but he was not offended; he declared

himself satisfied, and has promised to ordain me. Let us praise the Lord!"

Mr. Newton was ordained the following year. In the parish of **Olney** he found many who not only had evangelical views of the truth—but had also long walked in the light and experience of it. The vicarage was in the gift of the Earl of D____, the nobleman to whom Mr. Newton addressed the first twenty-six letters in his "Cardiphonia." The Earl was a man of real piety, and most amiable disposition; he had formerly appointed Moses Brown to the vicarage.

Mr. Brown was a faithful minister, and a good man; of course, he had afforded wholesome instruction to the parishioners of Olney; he had also been the instrument of a sound conversion in many of them. He was the author of a poetical piece, entitled "Sunday Thoughts," a translation of Professor Zimmerman's "Excellency of the Knowledge of Jesus Christ, etc." But Mr. Brown had a numerous family, and met with considerable trials in it; he too much resembled Eli, in his indulgence of his children. He was also under the pressure of financial difficulties, and had therefore accepted the Chaplaincy of Morden College, Blackheath, while Vicar of Olney.

Mr. Newton in these circumstances, undertook the curacy of *Olney*, in which he continued nearly *sixteen years*, previous to his removal to St. Mary Woolnoth, to which he was afterwards presented by the late JOHN THORNTON, Esq.

As Mr. Newton was under the greatest obligations to Mr. Thornton's friendship while at Olney, and had been enabled to extend his own usefulness by the bounty of that extraordinary man, it may not be foreign to our subject, to give some general outline of *Mr. Thornton's character*, in this place.

It is said of Solomon, that the Lord gave him largeness of heart, even as the sand on the sea shore; such a peculiar disposition for whatever was good or benevolent was also bestowed on Mr. Thornton. He differed as much from rich men of ordinary bounty, as they do from others who are parsimonious. Nor was this bounty the result of occasional impulse, like a summer shower, violent and short; on the contrary, it proceeded like a river, pouring its waters through various countries, copious and inexhaustible. Nor could those obstructions of imposture and ingratitude, which have often been advanced as the cause of damming up other streams, prevent or retard the course of this. The generosity of Mr. Thornton, indeed, frequently met with such hindrances, and led him to increasing discrimination—but the stream of his bounty never ceased to hold its course. Deep, silent, and overwhelming, it still rolled on, nor ended even with his life.

But the *fountain* from whence this beneficence flowed, and by which its permanency and direction were maintained, must not be concealed. Mr. Thornton was a Christian. Let no one, however, so mistake me here, as to suppose that I mean nothing more by the term CHRISTIAN, than the state of one, who, convinced of the truth of Scriptural revelation, gives assent to its doctrines—regularly attends its ordinances—and maintains, externally, a moral and religious deportment. Such a one may have a *name* to live—while he is dead; he may have a form of godliness—without the power of it; he may even be found denying and ridiculing that power—until, at length, he can only be convinced of his error at an infallible tribunal; where a widow, who gives but a mite, or a publican, who smites on his breast, shall be preferred before him.

Mr. Thornton was a *Christian indeed*; that is, he was alive to God by a spiritual regeneration. With this God he was daily and earnestly transacting that infinitely momentous affair, the salvation of his own

soul; and, next to that, the salvation of the souls of others. Temperate in all things, though base in nothing, he made provision for doing good with his opulence; and seemed to be most in his element when appropriating a considerable part of his large income to the necessities of others.

But Mr. Thornton possessed that *discrimination* in his attempts to serve his fellow-creatures, which distinguishes an enlightened mind. He habitually contemplated man, as one who has not only a body, subject to need, affliction, and death—but a spirit also, which is immortal, and must be happy or miserable forever. He felt, therefore, that the noblest exertions of charity are those which are directed to the relief of the noblest part of our frame. Accordingly, he left no mode of exertion untried to relieve man under his natural ignorance and depravity. To this end, he supported pastors, with a view to place in parishes the most enlightened, active and useful ministers. He employed the extensive commerce in which he was engaged, as a powerful instrument for conveying immense quantities of Bibles, Prayer-books, and the most useful publications, to every place visited by our trade. He printed, at his own sole expense, large editions of the latter for that purpose; and it may safely be affirmed, that there is scarcely a part of the known world, where such books could be introduced, which did not feel the beneficial influence of this single individual.

Nor was Mr. Thornton limited in his views of promoting the interests of real religion, with only the denomination with which he was connected. He stood ready to assist a beneficial design in every party. General good was his object; wherever or however it made its way.

But the nature and extent of his liberality will be greatly misconceived, if any one should suppose it confined to moral and

religious objects, though the grandest and most comprehensive exertions of it. Mr. Thornton was a philanthropist, on the largest scale—the friend of man, under all his needs. His manner of relieving his fellow-men was princely. Instances might be mentioned of it, were it proper to particularize, which would surprise those who did not know Mr. Thornton. They were so much out of ordinary course and expectation, that I know some who felt it their duty to inquire of him, whether the sum they had received was sent by his intention or by mistake. To this may be added, that the *manner* of presenting his gifts was as delicate and concealed, as the *measure* was large.

Besides this constant course of private donations, there was scarcely a public charity, or occasion of relief to the ignorant or necessitous, which did not meet with his distinguished support. His only question was, "May the miseries of man in any measure be removed or alleviated!" Nor was he merely distinguished by stretching out a liberal *hand*; his benevolent *heart* was so intent on doing good, that he was ever inventing and promoting plans for its diffusion at home or abroad.

He, who wisely desires any *end*—will as wisely regard the *means*. In this, Mr. Thornton was perfectly consistent. In order to execute his beneficent designs, he observed *frugality and exactness in his personal expenses*. By such prospective methods, he was able to extend the influence of his fortune far beyond those who, in still more elevated stations, are *slaves to expensive habits*. Such men meanly pace in the trammels of the tyrant *Custom*, until it leaves them scarcely enough to preserve their conscience, or even their credit; much less to employ their talents in Mr. Thornton's nobler pursuits. He, however, could afford to be generous; and, while he was generous, did not forget his duty in being just. He made ample provision for his children; and though, while they are living, it would

be indelicate to say more, I am sure of speaking truth, when I say—they are so far from thinking themselves impoverished by the bounty of their father, that they contemplate with the highest satisfaction the fruit of these benefits to society which he planted, which it may be trusted will extend with time itself, and which, after his example, they still labor to extend.

But, with all the piety and liberality of this honored character, no man had deeper views of his own unworthiness before his God. To the Redeemer's work alone, he looked for acceptance of his person and services; he felt that all he did, or could do—was infinitely short of that which had been done for him, and of the obligations that were thereby laid upon him. It was his abasedness of heart towards God, combined with the most singular largeness of heart towards his fellow-creatures, which distinguished John Thornton among men.

To this common patron of every useful and pious endeavor, Mr. Newton sent the "Narrative" from which the former part of these Memoirs is extracted. Mr. Thornton replied in his usual manner, that is, by accompanying his letter with a valuable bank-note; and, some months after, he paid Mr. Newton a visit at Olney. A closer connection being now formed between friends who employed their distinct talents in promoting the same benevolent cause, Mr. Thornton left a sum of money with Mr. Newton to be appropriated to the defraying of his necessary expenses, and the relief of the poor. "Be hospitable," said Mr. Thornton, "and keep an open house for such as are worthy of entertainment. Help the poor and needy. I will stately allow you 200 pounds a year, and readily send whatever you have occasion to draw for more." Mr. N. told me, that he thought he had received of Mr. Thornton upwards of 3000 pounds in this way, during the time he resided at Olney.

The case of most ministers is peculiar in this respect. Some among them may be looked up to, on account of their *publicity* and *talents*; they may have made great sacrifices of their personal interest in order to enter on their ministry, and may be possessed of the warmest benevolence—but, from the narrowness of their financial circumstances, and from the largeness of their families, they often perceive, that an ordinary tradesman in their parishes can subscribe to a charitable or popular institution much more liberally than themselves. This would have been Mr. Newton's case—but for the above-mentioned singular patronage.

A minister, however, should not be so forgetful of his dispensation, as to repine at his lack of power in this respect. He might as justly estimate his deficiency by the strength of the lion, or the flight of the eagle. The power communicated to him is of another kind; and power of every kind belongs to God, who gives gifts to every man individually as he will. The two mites of the widow were all the power of that kind, which was communicated to her; and her bestowment of her two mites was better accepted, than the large offerings of the rich man. The powers, therefore, of Mr. Thornton and of Mr. Newton, though of a different order, were both consecrated to God; and each might have said—of your own have we given back to you.

Providence seems to have appointed Mr. Newton's residence at Olney, among other reasons, for the relief of the depressed mind of the Poet WILLIAM COWPER. There has gone forth an unfounded report, that the deplorable melancholy of Cowper was, in part, derived from his residence and connections in that place. The fact, however, is the reverse of this; and, as it may be of importance to the interests of true religion to prevent such a misrepresentation from taking root, I will present the real state of the case, as I have found it attested by the most respectable living witnesses; and, more

especially as confirmed by a written memo by the poet himself, at the calmest period of his life, with the perusal of which I was favored by Mr. Newton.

It most evidently appears, that symptoms of Mr. Cowper's morbid state began to reveal themselves in his earliest youth. He seems to have been at all times *emotionally disordered*, in a greater or less degree. He was sent to Westminster school at the age of nine years, and long endured the tyranny of an elder boy, of which he gives an affecting account in the above mentioned memo; and which "produced," as one of his biographers observes, who had long intimacy with him, "an indelible effect upon his mind through life." A person so naturally bashful and depressed as Cowper, must needs find the profession of a Barrister a further occasion of anxiety. The post obtained for him by his friends in the House of Lords overwhelmed him; and the remonstrances, which those friends made against his relinquishing so honorable and lucrative an appointment (but which soon after actually took place), greatly increased the anguish of a mind already incapacitated for business. To all this were added events, which, of themselves, have been found sufficient to upset the strongest minds; namely, the decease of his intimate friend Sir William Russell; and his meeting with a disappointment in obtaining a wife, upon whom his affections were placed.

But the state of a person, torn and depressed, not by his religious connections—but by adverse circumstances, and these meeting a naturally morbid sensibility, long before he knew Olney, or had formed any connection with its inhabitants, will best appear from some verses which he sent at this time to one of his friends:

"Doomed as I am in solitude to waste
The present moments, and regret the past;

Deprived of every joy I valued most,
My *friend* torn from me, and my *mistress* lost
Call not this gloom I wear, this anxious deportment,
The dull effect of humor or of spleen,
Still, still I mourn with each returning day,
Him—snatched by fate, in early youth away;
And *her*, through tedious years of doubt and pain,
Fixed in her choice, and faithful—but in vain.

See me—before yet my destined course half done,
Cast forth a wanderer on a wild unknown
See me, neglected on the world's crude coast,
Each dear companion of my voyage lost!
Nor ask, why clouds of sorrow shade my brow,
And ready tears wait only leave to flow;
Why all that soothes a heart, from anguish free,
All that delights the happy—palls with me!"

Under such pressures, the *melancholy* and *susceptible* mind of Cowper received, from evangelical truth, the first consolation which it ever tasted. It was under the care of Dr. Cotton, of St. Alban's, (a physician as capable of administering to the spiritual as to the natural maladies of his patients,) that he first obtained a clear view of those sublime and animating doctrines which so distinguished and exalted his future strains as a poet. Here, also, he received that settled tranquility and peace, which he enjoyed for several years afterwards. So far, therefore, was his constitutional malady from being produced or increased by his evangelical connections, either at St. Alban's or at Olney, that he seems never to have had any settled peace, but from the truths he learned in these societies. It appears, that, among them alone, he found the only sunshine he ever enjoyed, through the cloudy day of his afflicted life.

It appears also, that, while at Dr. Cotton's, Mr. Cowper's distress was for a long time entirely removed, by marking that passage in Romans 3:25, "Him has God set forth to be an atoning sacrifice, through faith in his blood, to declare it is righteousness for the remission of sins that are past." In this Scripture he saw the remedy which God provides for the relief of a guilty conscience, with such clearness, that, for several years after, his heart was filled with love, and his life occupied with prayer, praise, and doing good to his needy fellow-creatures.

Mr. Newton told me, that, from Mr. Cowper's first coming to Olney, it was observed he had studied his Bible with such advantage, and was so well acquainted with its design, that not only his troubles were removed—but that, to the end of his life, he never had clearer views of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, than when he first became an attendant upon them; that (short intervals excepted) Mr. Cowper enjoyed a course of peace for several successive years; that, during this period, the inseparable attendants of a lively faith appeared, by Mr. Cowper's exerting himself to the utmost of his power in every benevolent service he could render to his poor neighbors; and that Mr. Newton used to consider him as a sort of personal helper, from his constant attendance upon the sick and afflicted, in that large and necessitous parish.

But the malady, which seemed to be subdued by the strong consolations of the Gospel, was still latent; and only required some occasion of irritation, to break out again, and overwhelm the patient. Any object of constant attention that shall occupy a mind previously disordered, whether fear, or love, or science, or religion, will not be so much the CAUSE of the disease, as the accidental OCCASION of exciting it. Cowper's Letters will show us how much his mind was occupied at one time by the truths of the Bible, and at another time

by the fictions of Homer—but his *melancholy* was, originally a *constitutional* disease—a *physical* disorder, which, indeed, could be affected either by the Bible or by Homer—but was utterly distinct in its nature from the mere matter of either. And here I cannot but mark this necessary distinction; having often been witness to cases where true religion has been assigned as the proper cause of insanity, when it has been only an accidental occasion, in the case of one already affected.

I have been an eye-witness of several instances of this kind of misrepresentation, but will detain the reader with mentioning only one. I was called to visit a woman whose mind was disordered; and, on my observing that it was a case which required the assistance of a physician, rather than that of a clergyman, her husband replied; "Sir, we sent to you, because it is a religious case; her mind has been injured by constantly reading the Bible." "I have known many instances," said I, "of people brought to their senses by reading the Bible—but it is possible, that too intense an application to that, as well as to any other subject, may have disordered your wife." "There is every proof of it," said he; and was proceeding to multiply his proofs, until his brother interrupted him by thus addressing me; "Sir, I have no longer patience to stand by, and see you imposed on. The truth of the matter is this; my brother has forsaken his wife, and been long connected with a loose woman. He had the best of wives in her, and one who was strongly attached to him—but she has seen his heart and property given to another; and, in her solitude and distress, went to the Bible, as the only consolation left her. Her health and spirits, at length, sunk under her troubles; and there she lies distracted, not from reading her Bible—but from the infidelity and cruelty of her husband." Does the reader wish to know what reply the husband made to this? He made no reply at all—but left the room with confusion of face!

Thus Cowper's malady, like a strong current, breaking down the banks which had hitherto sustained the pressure of its course, prevailed against the supports he had received, and precipitated him again into his former mental distress.

I inquired of Mr. Newton as to the manner in which Mr. Cowper's disorder returned, after an apparent recovery of nearly nine years' continuance; and was informed, that the first symptoms were discovered one morning, in his conversation, soon after he had undertaken a new engagement in *composition*.

As a general and full account of this extraordinary genius is already before the public, such particulars would not have occupied so much room in these Memoirs—but with a view of removing the false statements that have been made.

Of great importance also was the vicinity of Mr. Newton's residence to that of the Mr. Scott, then pastor of Ravenstone and Weston Underwood, and now rector of Astern Sandford; a man, whose ministry and writings have since been so useful to mankind. This clergyman was nearly a Socinian; he was in the habit of ridiculing evangelical religion, and labored to bring over Mr. Newton to His own sentiments. Mr. Scott had married a lady from the family of Mr. Wright, a gentleman in his parish, who had promised to provide for him. But Mr. Scott's objections to subscription arose so high, that he informed his patron it would be in vain to attempt providing for him in the Church of England; as he could not conscientiously accept a living, on the condition of subscribing its Liturgy and Articles. "This," said Mr. Newton, "gave me hopes of Mr. Scott's being *sincere*, however *wrong in his principles*."

But the benefit which Mr. Scott derived from his neighbor will best appear in his own words. [Scott's "Force of Truth," p. 11, etc. 5th

edit.] "I was," says he, "full of proud self-sufficiency, very positive, and very obstinate; and, being situated in the neighborhood of some of those whom the world calls *Methodists*, I joined in the prevailing sentiment; held them in total contempt; spoke of them with derision; declaimed against them from the pulpit—as people full of bigotry, wild enthusiasm, and spiritual pride; laid heavy things to their charge; and endeavored to prove the doctrines, which I *supposed* them to hold (for I had never read their books) to be dishonorable to God, and destructive of morality. And though, in some companies, I chose to conceal part of my sentiments; and, in all, affected to speak as a friend to *universal toleration*; yet, scarcely any person could be more proudly and violently prejudiced against both their people and *principles* than I then was.

"In January, 1774, two of my parishioners, a man and his wife, lay at the point of death. I had heard of the circumstance; but, according to my general custom, not being sent for, I took no notice of it; until, one evening, the woman being now dead, and the man dying, I heard that my neighbor Mr. Newton had been several times to visit them. Immediately my conscience reproached me with being shamefully negligent, in sitting at home within a few doors of dying people, my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly it occurred to me, that, whatever contempt I might have for Mr. Newton's doctrines, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character than my own. He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit, and supply my lack of care to those who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins.

"This reflection affected me so much, that, without delay, and very earnestly, yes with tears, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect; and I resolved thenceforth to be more attentive to this duty;

which resolution, though at first formed in ignorant dependence on my own strength, I have by Divine grace been enabled hitherto to keep. I went immediately to visit the survivor; and the affecting sight of one person already dead, and another expiring in the same chamber, served more deeply to impress my serious convictions.

"It was at this time that my correspondence with Mr. Newton commenced. At a visitation, May 1775, we exchanged a few words on a controverted subject, in the room among the clergy, which I believe drew many eyes upon us. At that time he prudently declined the discourse—but, a day or two after, he sent me a short note, with a little book for my perusal. This was the very thing I needed; and I gladly embraced the opportunity which, according to my wishes, seemed new to offer; God knows, with no inconsiderable expectations, that my arguments would prove irresistibly convincing, and that I should have the honor of rescuing a well-meaning person from his *religious delusions*.

"I had, indeed, by this time, conceived a very favorable opinion of him, and a sort of respect for him; being acquainted with the character he sustained, even among some people who expressed a disapprobation of his doctrines. They were forward to commend him as a *benevolent, unselfish, inoffensive person, and a laborious minister*. But, on the other hand, I looked upon his religious sentiments as rank fanaticism; and entertained a very contemptuous opinion of his abilities, natural and acquired. Once I had the curiosity to hear him preach; and, not understanding his sermon, I made a very great jest of it, where I could do it without giving offense. I had also read one of his publications—but, for the same reason, I thought the greater part of it whimsical, paradoxical, and unintelligible. Concealing, therefore, the true motives of my conduct, under the offer of friendship and a professed desire to know the

truth, (which, amidst all my self-sufficiency and prejudice, I trust the Lord had even then given me,) with the greatest affectation of candor, and of a mind open to conviction, I wrote him a long letter; purposing to draw from him such an avowal and explanation of his sentiments as might introduce a controversial discussion of our religious differences.

"The event by no means answered my expectation. He returned a very friendly and long answer to my letter; in which he carefully avoided the mention of those doctrines which he knew would offend me. He declared that he believed me to be one who feared God, and was under the teaching of his Holy Spirit; that he gladly accepted my offer of friendship, and was no ways inclined to *dictate* to me—but that, leaving me to the guidance of the Lord, he would be glad, as occasion served, from time to time, to bear testimony to the truths of the Gospel; and to communicate his sentiments to me, on any subject, with all the confidence of friendship.

"In this manner, our correspondence began; and it was continued, in the interchange of nine or ten letters, until December in the same year. Throughout I held my convictions, and he his. I made use of every endeavor to draw him into controversy, and filled my letters with definitions, inquiries, arguments, objections, and consequences, requiring explicit answers. He, on the other hand, *shunned everything controversial as much as possible*, and filled his letters with the most useful and least offensive instructions; except that, now and then, he dropped his hints concerning the necessity, the true nature, and the efficacy of saving faith, and the manner in which it was to be sought and obtained; and concerning some other matters, suited, as he judged, to help me forward in my inquiry after truth. But they much offended my prejudices, afforded me matter of disputation, and at that time were of little use to me.

"When I had made this little progress in seeking the truth, my acquaintance with Mr. Newton was resumed. From the conclusion of our correspondence, in December 1775, until April 1777, it had been almost wholly dropped. To speak plainly, I did not care for his company; I did not mean to make any use of him as an instructor; and I was unwilling that others should think us in any way connected. But, under discouraging circumstances, I had occasion to call upon him; and his discourse so comforted and edified me, that my heart, being by his means relieved from its burden, became susceptible of affection for him. From that time I was inwardly pleased to have him for my friend; though not, as now, rejoiced to call him so. I had, however, even at that time, no thoughts of learning *doctrinal truth* from him, and was ashamed to be detected in his company—but I sometimes stole away to spend an hour with him. About the same period, I once heard him preach—but still it was *foolishness* to me; his sermon being principally upon the believer's experience, in some particulars, with which I was unacquainted. So that, though I loved and valued him, I considered him as a person misled by fanatic notions; and strenuously insisted that we would never think alike until we met in heaven."

Mr. Scott, after going on to particularize his progress in the discovery of truth, and the character of Mr. Newton as its minister, afterwards adds:

"The pride of reasoning, and the conceit of superior discernment, had all along accompanied me; and, though somewhat broken, had yet considerable influence. Hitherto, therefore, I had not thought of hearing any person preach; because I did not think anyone in the circle of my acquaintance capable of giving me such information as I wanted. But, being at length convinced that Mr. Newton had been right, and that I had been mistaken, in the several particulars in

which we had differed, it occurred to me, that, having preached these doctrines so long, he must understand many things concerning them to which I was a stranger. Now, therefore, though not without much remaining prejudice, and not less in the character of a judge than of a scholar—I condescended to be his *hearer*, and occasionally to attend his preaching, and that of some other ministers. I soon perceived the benefit; for, from time to time, the secrets of my heart were revealed to me, far beyond what I had hitherto noticed; and I seldom returned from hearing a sermon, without having conceived a lower opinion of myself—without having attained to a further acquaintance with my deficiencies, weaknesses, corruptions, and needs—or without being supplied with fresh matter for prayer, and directed to greater watchfulness. I likewise learned the use of *experience* in preaching; and was convinced, that the readiest way to reach the hearts and consciences of others—was to speak from my own! In short, I gradually saw more and more my need of instruction, and was at length brought to consider myself as a very *novice* in spiritual matters. Thus I began experimentally to perceive our Lord's meaning, when he says, *Unless you receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, you shall never enter therein.*"

If I have seemed to digress in dwelling so long on these three characters, let the reader consider the importance of the facts, and their intimate connection with Mr. Newton's history; and let me inform him, that the author has a design much nearer his heart than that of precision in setting forth the history of an individual; namely, that of *exhibiting the nature and importance of vital and experimental religion*; he therefore gladly brings forward any fact found in his way, which may tend to illustrate it.

MEMOIRS part 3

But to return to the more immediate subject of these Memoirs. In the year 1776, Mr. Newton was afflicted with a tumor, which had formed on his thigh; and, on account of its growing more large and troublesome, he resolved to undergo surgical excision. This obliged him to go to London for the operation, which was successfully performed, October 10th, by the late Dr. Warner. I remember hearing him speak, several years afterwards, of this trying occasion—but the trial did not seem to have affected him as a painful operation, so much as a critical opportunity in which he might fail in demonstrating the patience of a Christian under pain. "I felt," said he, "that, being enabled to bear a very sharp operation with tolerable calmness and confidence, was a greater favor granted to me than the deliverance from my malady!"

"The following reflections on this occasion occur in Mr. Newton's diary: "You supported me, and made this operation very tolerable. The tumor, by your blessing, was happily excised; so that on Sunday the 27th, I was enabled to go to church and hear Mr. F—, and the Sunday following to preach for him. The tenderness and attention of Dr. and Mrs. F—, with whom we were, I cannot sufficiently describe; nor, indeed, the kindness of many other friends. To them I would be thankful, my Lord—but especially to You; for what are *creatures*—but *instruments* in your hand, fulfilling your pleasure? At home, all was preserved quiet; and I met with no incident to distress or disturb me while absent. The last two weeks I preached often, and was hurried about in seeing my friends—but, though I had little leisure or opportunity for retirement, my heart, alas! was as usual—sadly reluctant and dull in secret. Yet, in public, You were pleased to favor me with liberty."

While Mr. Newton thus continued faithfully discharging the duties of his station, and watching for the temporal and eternal welfare of his flock, a *dreadful fire* broke out at Olney, Oct. 1777. Mr. Newton took an active part in comforting and relieving the sufferers; he collected upwards of 200 pounds for them; a considerable sum of money, when the poverty and late calamity of the place are considered. Such instances of benevolence towards the people, with the constant assistance he afforded the poor, by the help of Mr. Thornton, naturally led him to expect that he would have so much influence as to restrain gross licentiousness on particular occasions. But, to use his own expression, he had "lived to bury the old crop, on which no dependence could be placed."

He preached a weekly lecture, which occurred that year on the 5th of November; and, as he feared that the usual way of celebrating it at Olney might endanger his hearers in their attendance at the church, he exerted himself to preserve some degree of quiet on that evening. Instead, however, of hearkening to his entreaties, the looser sort exceeded their former extravagance, drunkenness, and rioting; and even obliged him to send out money, to preserve his house from violence. This happened but a year before he finally left Olney. When he related this occurrence to me, he added, that he believed he would never have left the place while he lived, had not so incorrigible a spirit prevailed, in a parish which he had long labored to reform.

But I must remark here, that this is no solitary fact, nor at all unaccountable. The Gospel, we are informed, is not merely a savor of life unto life—but also of death unto death. Those, whom it does not *soften*—it is often found to *harden*. Thus we find Paul went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But, as

many were hardened, and believed not—but spoke evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them.

The strong man armed seeks to keep his house and goods in peace; and, if a minister is disposed to let this sleep of death remain, that minister's own house and goods may be permitted to remain in peace also. Such a minister may be esteemed by his parish as a good kind of man—quiet, inoffensive, candid, etc., and, if he reveals any zeal, it is directed to keep the parish in the state he found it; that is, in ignorance and unbelief, worldly-minded and hard-hearted—the very state of peace in which the strong man armed seeks to keep his palace or citadel, the human heart.

But, if a minister, like the subject of these Memoirs, enters into the design of his commission—if he is alive to the interest of his own soul, and that of the souls committed to his charge; or, as the Apostle expresses it, to "save himself and those who hear him," he may depend upon meeting in his own experience the truth of that declaration, "Yes, all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, *shall* suffer persecution," in one form of it or another. One of the most melancholy sights we behold, is when any part of the church, through prejudice, joins the world in throwing the stone. There is, however, such a determined enmity against godliness itself, in the breasts of a certain class of men existing in most parishes, that, whatever learning and good sense are found in their teacher—whatever consistency of character or blameless deportment he exhibits—whatever benevolence or bounty (like that which Mr. Newton exercised at Olney) may constantly appear in his character—such men remain irreconcilable! They will resist every attempt made to appease their enmity. God alone, who changed the hearts of Paul and of Mr. Newton, can heal these bitter waters!

I recollect to have heard Mr. Newton say, on such an occasion, "When God is about to perform any great work, he generally permits some great *opposition* to it. Suppose Pharaoh had acquiesced in the departure of the children of Israel—or that they had met with no difficulties in the way—they would, indeed, have passed from Egypt to Canaan with ease—but they, as well as the church in all future ages, would have been great losers. The wonder-working God would not have been seen in those extremities which make his arm so visible. A smooth passage while here on earth—would have made but a poor story."

But, under such disorders, was Mr. Newton tempted to depart from the line marked out by the precept and example of his Master. He continued to bless those who persecuted him; knowing that the servant of the Lord must not strive—but be gentle unto all men, able to teach, patient when wronged. To the last day he spent among them, he went straight forward, in meekness instructing those that opposed, if God perhaps might give them repentance, leading to the acknowledging of the truth.

But, before we take a final leave of Olney, the reader must be informed of another part of Mr. Newton's labors. He had published a volume of *Sermons* before he became pastor, dated Liverpool, January 1, 1760. In 1762, he published his "Omicron;" to which his Letters, signed "Vigil," were afterwards annexed. In 1764, appeared his "Narrative;" in 1767, a volume of Sermons, preached at Olney; in 1769, his "Review of Ecclesiastical History;" and, in 1779, a volume of Hymns; of which some were composed by Mr. Cowper. To these followed, in 1781, his valuable work "Cardiphonia." But more will be said of these in their place.

From Olney Mr. Newton was removed to the Rectory of the united parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth, and St. Mary Woolchurch-Haw, on the presentation of his friend Mr. Thornton.

These parishes had been favored with two very eminent pastors before Mr. Newton appeared; namely, Josias Shute, who died 1643; and Ralph Robinson, who died in 1655. There is a well-written account of Mr. Shute in the *Christian Observer* for January 1804; from which it appears, that his piety, ministerial talents, and moderation, in those difficult times, were very much distinguished, during the thirty-three years which he continued rector. Granger, in his *Biographical History of England*, says, that "his learning in divinity and ecclesiastical history was extensive, indeed almost universal." And Walker, in his *Account of the Clergy*, says, that, "In the beginning of the troubles, he was molested and harassed to death, and denied a funeral sermon to be preached for him by Dr. Holdsworth, as he desired;" and that he was "a person of great piety, charity, and gravity, and of a most sweet and affable temper." It further appears, that, like his successor Mr. Newton, he preached twice on the Sunday, and had a lecture in his church every Wednesday. Mr. Robinson died young—but has left a volume of truly evangelical discourses, preached at St. Mary's.

Mr. Newton preached his first sermon in these parishes, December 19, 1779, from Ephesians 4:15. *Speaking the truth in love*. It contained an affectionate address to his parishioners, and was immediately published for their use.

Here a new and very distinct scene of action and usefulness was set before him. Placed in the center of London—in an opulent neighborhood—with connections daily increasing, he had now a course of service to pursue, in several respects different from his

former at Olney. Being, however, well acquainted with the *Word of God* and *the heart of man*—he proposed to himself no new weapons of warfare, for pulling down the strong-holds of sin and Satan around him. He perceived, indeed, most of his parishioners too intent upon their wealth and merchandise, to pay much regard to their new minister. But since they would not come to him—he was determined to go, so far as he could, to go to them; and therefore, soon after his institution, he sent a *printed address* to his parishioners; he afterwards sent them another address, on the usual prejudices that are taken up against the Gospel. What effects these attempts had then upon them, does not appear; certain it is, that these, and other acts of his ministry, will be recollected by them, when the objects of their present pursuits are forgotten or lamented.

Writing of himself, John Newton says, "That I, one of the most ignorant, the most miserable, and the most abandoned of slaves—should be plucked from my forlorn state of slavery in Africa, and at length be appointed as minister of the gospel in London, the foremost city in the world—that I should there, not only testify of God's grace—but stand up as a singular instance and monument of His grace—that I should be enabled to minister to the world at large through my writings—is a fact I can contemplate with admiration—but never sufficiently estimate." This reflection, indeed, was so present to his mind, on all occasions and in all places, that he seldom passed a single day any where—but he was found referring to God's grace, in one way or ether.

When Mr. Newton came to London—being of the most friendly and generous disposition, his house was open to Christians of all ranks and denominations. Here, like a father among his children, he used to entertain, encourage, and instruct his friends; especially younger ministers, or candidates for the ministry. Here also the poor, the

afflicted, and the tempted found an asylum and a sympathy, which they could scarcely find, in an equal degree, anywhere else.

His timely hints were often given with much point and profitableness, to the numerous acquaintance which surrounded him in this public station. Some time after Mr. Newton had published his "Omicron," and described the three stages of growth in religion, from the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, distinguishing them by the letters A. B. and C., a conceited young minister wrote to Mr. Newton, telling him that he read his own character accurately drawn in the character of C. Mr. Newton wrote in reply, that, in drawing the character of C. or *full Christian maturity*, he had forgotten to add, until now, one prominent feature of C.'s character; namely, that C. never knew his own face.

"It grieves me," said Mr. Newton, "to see so few of my wealthy parishioners come to church. I always consider the rich as under greater obligations to the preaching of the Gospel than the poor. For, at church, the rich must hear the whole truth—as well as others. There they have no mode of escape. But let them once get home, you will be troubled to get at them; and, when you are admitted, you are so fettered with *petty points of etiquette*—so interrupted and damped with the frivolous conversation of their friends, that, as Leighton says, 'It is well if your visit does not prove a blank or a blot!'"

Mr. Newton used to improve every occurrence which he could with propriety bring into the pulpit. One night he found a prayer request posted at the church, upon which he largely commented when he came to preach. The note was to this effect; "A young man, having come to the possession of a very considerable fortune, desires the prayers of the congregation, that he may be preserved from the

snare to which it exposes him." "Now if the man," said Mr. Newton, "had lost a fortune, the world would not have wondered to have seen him put up a prayer request—but this man has been better taught."

Coming out of his church, on a Wednesday, a lady stopped him on the steps, and said, "My lottery ticket has drawn a prize of ten thousand pounds. I know you will congratulate me upon the occasion." "Madam," said he, "as for a friend under temptation, I will endeavor to pray for you."

Soon after he came to St. Mary's, I remember to have heard him say, in a certain company, "Some have observed, that I preach shorter sermons on a Sunday morning, and with more caution—but this I do upon *studied principle*. I suppose I may have two or three of my bankers present, and some others of my parish, who have hitherto been strangers to my views of truth.

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men—so that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Corinthians 9:22. The fowler must go cautiously—to catch timid birds. I endeavor to imitate the Apostle, "I have become all things to all men." But observe his end; it was "so that by all possible means I might save some."

"I have fed you with milk," says the Apostle. But there are some that are not only for forcing strong meat—but forcing large bones too, down the throat of the child! We must have patience with a single step in the case of an infant—and there are first-step books and sermons, which are good in their place. Christ taught his disciples, "as they were able to hear," and it was upon the same principle that the Apostle accommodated himself to the spiritual state of his hearers.

Now, what I wish to remark on these considerations is, that this apostolic principle, steadily pursued, will render a minister apparently inconsistent. Superficial hearers will think him a 'trimmer'. On the other hand, a minister, destitute of the apostolic principle and intention, and directing his whole force to preserve the appearance of consistency, may thus seem to pre

I could not help observing, one day, how much Mr. Newton was grieved with the mistake of a minister, who appeared to pay too much attention to politics. "For my part," said he, "I have no temptation to turn *politician*, and much less to inflame a party, in these troubled times. When a ship is leaky, and a mutinous spirit divides the company on board; but a wise man would say, 'My good friends, while we are debating—the water is sinking us! We had better leave the debate, and go to the pumps! I endeavor to turn my people's eyes from human *instruments* to God. I am continually attempting to show them, how far they are from knowing either the matter of fact or the matter of right. I inculcate our great privileges in this country, and advise a discontented man to take a lodging for a little while in Russia or Prussia."

Though no great variety of anecdote is to be expected in a course so stationary as this part of Mr. Newton's life and ministry. Sometimes his whole day was so benevolently spent—so that all the day, he was found both rejoicing with those who rejoiced—and literally weeping with those who wept!" The portrait, which Goldsmith drew from imagination, Mr. Newton realized in fact; in so much, that, had Mr. Newton sat for his picture to the poet, it could not have been more accurately delineated than by the following lines in his "Deserted Village"—

"Unskillful he to fawn, or seek for power
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour.
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
More bent to raise the wretched, than to rise.

Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,
And even his failings leaned to Virtue's side;
But, in his duty prompt at every call,
He watched and wept, he prayed and felt, for all.

And, as a bird each fond endearment tries,
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way."

I remember to have heard him say, when speaking of his continual interruptions, "I see in this world two heaps, of human happiness and misery. Now, if I can take but the smallest bit from one heap and add to the other, I shall be content. If, as I go home, I meet a child who has lost a penny, and if, by giving it another penny, I can wipe away its tears—I feel I have done something. I would be glad, indeed, to do greater things—but I will not neglect these smaller acts of kindness. When I hear a knock at my study door—I hear a *message from God*. It may be a lesson of instruction for him; or perhaps a lesson of patience for me—but, since it is His message, it must be beneficial."

But it was not merely under his own roof that his benevolent aims were thus exerted; he was found ready to take an active part in relieving the miserable, directing the anxious, or recovering the wanderer, in whatever state or place he discovered such; of which take the following instance.

Mr. _____, who is still living, and who holds a post of great importance abroad, was a youth of considerable talents, and had received a respectable education. I am not informed of his original destination, but he left his parents in Scotland, with a design of viewing the world at large; and that, without those financial resources which could render such an undertaking practicable. Yet, having the optimistic expectations of youth, together with its inexperience, he determinately pursued his plan. I have seen an account from his own hand, of the strange—but by no means dishonorable, resources to which he was reduced in the pursuit of this scheme; nor can *romance* exceed the detail. But the particulars of his long journey, until he arrived in London, and those which have since occurred, would not be proper, at present, for anyone to record except himself; and I cannot but wish he would favor the world with his excursion to London. He eventually did come—and then he seemed to come to himself. He had heard Mr. Newton's character, and on a Sunday evening he came to Mr. Newton's church, and stood in one of the aisles while Mr. Newton preached. In the course of that week he wrote Mr. Newton some account of his adventure, and state of mind. Such circumstances could be addressed to no man more properly.

Mr. Newton therefore gave notice from the pulpit on the following Sunday evening, that, if the person was present who had sent him such a letter, he would be glad to speak with him. Mr. _____ gladly accepted the invitation, and came to Mr. Newton's house, where a friendship began which continued until Mr. Newton's death. Mr. Newton not only afforded this youth the instruction which he, at this period, so deeply needed—but, marking his fine abilities and corrected inclination, he introduced him to Henry Thornton, Esq., who, inheriting his father's unbounded liberality and determined adherence to the cause of true religion, readily patronized the stranger. By the munificence of this gentleman, he was supported

through a university education, and was afterwards ordained to the Christian ministry. It was, however, thought expedient that his talents should be employed in an important station abroad, which he readily undertook, and in which he now maintains a very distinguished character. It ought not to be concealed, that, since his advancement, he has not only returned his patron the whole expense of his university education—but has also placed in his hands an equal sum, for the education of some pious youth, who might be deemed worthy of that assistance once afforded to himself!

Mr. Newton used to spend a month or two, annually, at the house of some friend in the country. He always took an affectionate leave of his congregation before he departed; and spoke of his leaving town as quite uncertain of returning to it, considering the variety of incidents which might prevent that return. Nothing was more remarkable than his constant habit of regarding the hand of God in every event, however trivial it might appear to others. On every occasion—in the concerns of every hour—in matters public or private, like Enoch, he walked with God.

Take a single instance of his state of mind in this respect. In walking to his church he would say, "The way of man is not in himself, nor can he conceive what belongs to a single step. When I go to the church, it seems the same whether I turn down one certain street—or go through a different one—but the going through one street and not another may produce an effect of lasting consequences. A man cut down my hammock in sport—but had he cut it down half an hour later, I would not be here; as the *my drew was then boarding the ship*. A man made a fire on the deserted island we had been shipwrecked one, at just the time a ship passed and saw it, landed there, and afterwards brought me to England."

Mr. Newton had experienced a *severe affliction* soon after he came to St. Mary's, in the death of His niece, Miss Eliza Cunningham. He loved her with the affection of a parent; and she was, indeed, truly lovely. He had brought her up; and had observed, that, with the most amiable natural qualities, she possessed a real piety. With every possible attention from Mr. and Mrs. Newton and their friends, they saw her gradually sink into the arms of death—but fully prepared to meet him, as a messenger sent from a yet kinder Father; to whom she departed, October 6th, 1785, aged fourteen years and eight months. On this occasion Mr. Newton published some brief memoirs of her character and death.

In the years 1784 and 1785, Mr. Newton preached a course of sermons, on an occasion of which he gives the following account in his first discourse, "Conversation, in almost every company, for some time past, has much turned upon the commemoration of Handel; and, particularly, on his oratorio of the 'Messiah.' I mean to lead your meditations to the language of the oratorio; and to consider, in their order, (if the Lord, on whom our breath depends, shall be pleased to afford life, ability, and opportunity) the several sublime and interesting passages of Scripture which are the basis of that admired composition." In the year 1786, he published these discourses, in two volumes octavo.

There is a passage so original, at the beginning of his fourth sermon, from Mal. 3:1-3, *The Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple*, etc. that I shall transcribe it for the use of such as have not seen these discourses; at the same time, it will, in a few words, convey Mr. Newton's idea of the usual *performance of this oratorio*, or attending its performance, in present circumstances.

"Whereunto shall we liken the people of this generation, and to what are they like? I represent to myself a number of people, of various characters, involved in one common charge of high treason. They are already in a state of confinement—but not yet brought to their trial. The facts, however, are so plain, and the evidence against them so strong and pointed, that there is not the least doubt of their guilt being fully proved, and that nothing but a pardon can preserve them from punishment. In this situation, it should seem their wisdom to avail themselves of every expedient in their power for obtaining mercy. But they are entirely regardless of their imminent danger, and wholly taken up with contriving methods of amusing themselves, that they may pass away the term of their imprisonment with as much cheerfulness as possible!

"Among other resources, they call in the assistance of *music*. And, amidst a great variety of subjects in this way, they are particularly pleased with one; they choose to make the solemnities of their impending trial, the character of their Judge, the methods of his procedure, and the dreadful sentence to which they are exposed—the ground-work of a musical entertainment! And, as if they were quite unconcerned in the outcome, their attention is chiefly fixed upon the skill of the composer, in adapting the style of his music to the very solemn declarations and subject with which they are trifling. The King, however, unasked by them, and from his great mercy and compassion towards those who have no pity for themselves, goes before them with his goodness; and sends them a gracious message. He assures them that he is unwilling that they should suffer; he requires, yes, he entreats them to submit to him! He points out a way in which their confession and submission shall be certainly accepted; and, in this way, which he condescends to prescribe, he offers them a free and a full pardon!

"But, instead of taking a single step towards a compliance with his goodness, they likewise set his message to music; and this, together with a description of their present state, and of the fearful doom awaiting them if they continue obstinate, is sung for their entertainment; and accompanied with the sound of the "horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music." Surely, if such a case as I have supposed could be found in real life, though I might admire the musical taste of these people—I should commiserate their stupidity and insensibility!"

But, clouds return after the ruin; a *greater loss* than that of Miss C. was to follow. Enough has been said in these Memoirs already to show the more than ordinary affection Mr. Newton felt for his wife **Polly**, who had been so long *his idol*, as he used to call her; of which I shall add but one more instance, out of many that might easily be collected.

Being with him at the house of a lady at Blackheath, we stood at a window which had a prospect of *Shooter's Hill*. "Ah," said Mr. Newton, "I remember the many journeys I took from London to stand at the top of that hill, in order to look towards the part in which Polly then lived; not that I could see the spot itself, after traveling several miles, for she lived far beyond what I could see, when on the hill—but it gratified me even to look *towards* the spot; and this I did always once, and sometimes twice a week." "Why," said I, "this is like one of the *vagaries of romance*, than of real life." "True," replied he; "but real life has extravagancies that would not be admitted to appear in a well written romance; they would be said to be beyond imagination."

In such a continued habit of excessive attachment, it is evident how keenly Mr. Newton must have felt, while he observed the progress of

a threatening tumor in her lungs. The pain it occasioned at the time soon wore off—but a small lump remained in the part affected. In October, 1788, on the tumor's increasing, she applied to an eminent surgeon, who told her it was a cancer, and now too large for extraction, and that he could only recommend quiet rest. As the spring of 1789 advanced, her malady increased; and, though she was able to bear a journey to Southampton, from which she returned, in other respects, tolerably well, she grew gradually worse with the cancer, until she expired, December 15, 1790.

Mr. Newton made this remark on her death; "Just before her disease became so formidable, I was preaching on the waters of Egypt being turned into blood. The Egyptians had *idolized* their river, and God made them loathe it. I was apprehensive it would soon be a similar case with me." During the very affecting season of her dissolution, Mr. Newton, like David, wept and prayed—but, the desire of his eyes being taken away by the stroke, he too, like David, arose from the earth, and came into the temple of the Lord, and worshiped, and that in a manner which surprised some of his friends.

I must own I was not one of those who saw anything that might not be expected from such a man, surrounded with such circumstances. I did not wonder at his undertaking to preach her funeral sermon, on the following Sunday, since I always considered him as unique, and his case quite an exception to general habits in many respects. There could be no question as to the affection he had borne to his deceased wife; it had even prevailed, as he readily allowed, to an eccentric and blamable degree; and indeed, after her removal, he used to observe an annual seclusion, for a special recollection of her, whom through the year he had never forgotten, and from which proceeded a sort of little elegies or sonnets to her memory. But he clearly recognized the *will of God* in the removal of his idol, and reasoned as David did on

the occasion; "I fasted and wept while she was alive, for I said, *Perhaps the Lord will be gracious to me and let her live.* But why should I fast when she is dead? Can I bring her back again? I will go to her one day—but she cannot return to me."

Besides which, Mr. Newton had a favorite sentiment, which I have heard him express in different ways, long before he had so special an occasion of illustrating it in practice. "God in his providence," he used to say, "is continually bringing about occasions to demonstrate characters." He used to allege the case of Achan and Judas among ungodly men; and that of Paul (Acts 27:1-44), among godly ones. "If anyone," said he, "had asked the commander of the ship *whom Paul the prisoner was*—it is probable he would have thus replied; 'He is a troublesome enthusiast, who has lately joined himself to a certain sect. These people affirm that a Jewish malefactor, who was crucified some years ago at Jerusalem, rose the third day from the dead; and this Paul is insane enough to assert that Jesus, the leader of their sect, is not only now alive—but that he himself has seen him, and is resolved to live and die for him. Poor crazy creature! But God made use of this Paul's imprisonment to reveal the real character of Paul; and taught the Centurion, from the circumstances which followed, to whom it was he owed his direction in the storm, and for whose sake he received his preservation through it.'"

In all trying occasions, therefore, Mr. Newton was particularly impressed with the idea of a CHRISTIAN, and especially of a *Christian minister*, being called to stand forward as an example to his flock—to feel himself placed in a post of honor—a post in which he may not only glorify God—but also forcibly demonstrate the *special supports of the Gospel*. More especially, when this could be done (as in his own case) from no doubtful motive; then, it may be expedient to leave the path of ordinary custom, for the greater reason of exhibiting both the doctrines of truth and the experience of their power.

Though I professedly publish none of Mr. Newton's letters—yet I shall take the liberty to insert part of one written on December 5th, 1796 to a friend in Rome. It shows the interest which the writer took in the safety of his friend, and his address in attempting to break the *enchancements* with which men of taste are surrounded when standing in the center of the *Fine Arts*.

The true Christian has no home in this present world. He is, and must be—a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth. His citizenship, treasure, and real home are in a better and eternal world. Every step he takes—is a step nearer to his Father's house! He sets the Lord always before him, and finds himself equally near the Throne of Grace at all times and in all places.

I trust, my dear sir, that you will carry out a determination similar to that of the patriarch Jacob, who made this vow: "If God will be with me and protect me on this journey and give me food and clothing, and if He will bring me back safely to my father—then I will make the Lord my God!" Genesis 28:20-21. May the Lord himself write it on your heart!

You are now at Rome, the center of the Fine Arts; a place abounding with everything to gratify a person of your taste. Athens had the pre-eminence in the Apostle Paul's time; and I think it highly probable, from many passages in his writings, that he likewise had a taste capable of admiring and relishing the beauties of painting, sculpture and music—which he could not but observe during his abode in Athens.

But he had a higher, a spiritual, a divine taste, which was greatly shocked and grieved by the ignorance, idolatry, and wickedness which surrounded him; insomuch that he could attend to nothing else! This taste, which cannot be acquired by any effort or study of ours—but is freely bestowed on all who sincerely ask it from the Lord, divests the vanities which the duped world admire; and enables us to judge of the most splendid works of unsaved men, according to the declaration of the Prophet, "They hatch viper's eggs and weave spider's webs! Whoever eats their eggs will die; crack one open—and a viper is hatched!" Isaiah 59:5.

Much ingenuity is displayed in the weaving of a spider's web—but, when finished, it is worthless and useless. Incubation of eggs requires close diligence and attention; if the hen is too long away from her nest, the egg is spoiled. Why should she sit at all upon the egg, and watch it, and warm it night and day—if it only produces a viper at last!

Thus vanity or evil are the chief ends of unsanctified genius. The artists spin spider's webs; and the philosophers, by their learned speculations, hatch viper's eggs—only to poison themselves and their fellow-creatures! Few of either sort have one serious thought of that dreadful eternity—upon the brink of which they stand for a while; or the depth of misery, to which they successively and shortly must fall.

"How terrible, how terrible for that great city! She was so beautiful—like a woman clothed in finest purple and scarlet linens, decked out with gold and precious stones and pearls! And in one single moment all the wealth of the city is gone! They will weep as they watch the smoke ascend, and they will say, 'Where in all the world is there another city like this!' And they will throw dust on their heads to show their great sorrow. And they will say, 'How terrible, how terrible for the great city! She made us all rich from her great wealth. And now in a single hour it is all gone!' Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder as large as a great millstone. He threw it into the ocean and shouted— Babylon, the great city, will be thrown down as violently as I have thrown away this stone, and she will disappear forever. Never again will the sound of music be heard there—no more harps, songs, flutes, or trumpets. There will be no industry of any kind, and no more milling of grain. Her nights will be dark, without a single lamp. There will be no happy voices of brides and grooms. This will happen because her merchants, who were the greatest in the world, deceived the nations with her sorceries!" Revelation 18

"You kindly inquire after *my health*. I am, through the grace of God—perfectly well. Yet, as healthy as I am, I labor under a growing disorder, for which there is no cure—I mean *old age*. I am glad that it is a mortal disease, from which I will not recover. I would not always want to live in such a world as this—as I have a Scriptural hope of an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—reserved in heaven for me! I am now in my seventy-second year, and seem to have lived long enough for myself. I have known something of the evils of life, and have had a large share of the good. I know what the world can do—and what it cannot do; it can neither give nor take away that *peace of God* which passes all understanding; it cannot soothe a wounded conscience, nor enable us to meet death and eternity with comfort.

That you, my dear friend, may have an abiding and abounding experience that the Gospel is a "universal remedy" adapted to all our wants and all our woes, and a "suitable help" when every other help fails, is the sincere and ardent prayer of your affectionate friend,
John Newton

But, in proportion as Mr. Newton felt the vanity of the pursuits which he endeavored to expose in the foregoing letter, he was as feelingly alive to whatever regarded eternal concerns. Take an instance of this, in a visit which he paid to another friend. This friend was a minister who labored for great accuracy in his discourses in that Sunday morning's sermon, nearly occupied an hour in insisting on several labored and minute distinctions in the grammatical text.

As he had a high estimation of Mr. Newton's judgment, he inquired of him, as they walked home, whether he thought the distinctions just now insisted on, were full and judicious. Mr. Newton said he thought them not full, as a very important one had been omitted.

"What can that be?" said the minister; "for I had taken more than ordinary care to enumerate them fully."

"I think not," replied Mr. Newton; for, "many of your congregation had traveled several miles for a spiritual meal—and you have given them mostly BONES—and very little MEAT!"

In 1799, Mr. Newton had the honorary degree of *Doctor of Divinity* conferred upon him by the University of New Jersey in America, and the diploma sent to him. He also received a work in two volumes, dedicated to him with the above title annexed to his name. Mr. Newton wrote the author a grateful acknowledgment for the work—but begged to decline an honor which he never intended to accept. "I am," said he, "as one born out of due time. I have neither the

pretension nor wish to honors of this kind. However, therefore, the University may over-rate my attainments, and thus show their respect, I must not forget myself; it would be both vain and improper were I to concur in it."

In a note dated December 15th, 1797, Mr. Newton writes, "Though I am not so sensibly affected as I could wish—I hope I am truly affected by the frequent reviews I make of my past life. Perhaps the annals of Your church scarcely afford an instance in all respects so singular. Perhaps Your grace may have recovered some from an equal degree of apostasy, infidelity, and profligacy—but few of them have been redeemed from such a state of misery and vileness as I was in, upon the coast of Africa, when Your unsought mercy wrought my deliverance. But, that such a wretch should not only be spared and pardoned—but reserved to the honor of preaching Your Gospel, which I had blasphemed and renounced, and at length be placed in a very public situation, and favored with acceptance and usefulness, both from the pulpit and the press; so that my poor name is known in most parts of the world, where there are any who know You—this is astonishing indeed! The more You have exalted me, the more I ought to abase myself.

But Mr. Newton had yet another storm to weather. While we were contemplating the long and rough voyage he had passed, and thought he had only now to rest in a quiet haven, and with a fine sun-setting at the close of the evening of his life—*clouds* began to gather again, and seemed to threaten a wreck at the very entry of the port.

He used to make excursions in the summer to different friends in the country; endeavoring to make these visits profitable to them and their neighbors, by his continual prayers, and the expositions he gave of the Scriptures read at their morning and evening worship. I have

heard of some who were first brought to the knowledge of themselves and of God, by attending his exhortations on these occasions; for, indeed, besides what he undertook in a more stated way at the church, he seldom entered a room but something both profitable and entertaining fell from his lips.

After the death of *Miss Cunningham* and his *Polly*—his companion in these summer excursions was his other niece, *Miss Elizabeth Catlett*. This young lady had also been brought up by John and Polly, along with *Miss Cunningham*; and, on the death of the two latter, she became the object of Mr. Newton's naturally affectionate disposition. She also became quite necessary to him by her administrations in his latter years; she watched him, walked with him, and visited wherever he went; when his sight failed, she read to him, prepared his food, and was unto him, all that a dutiful daughter could be.

But, in the year 1801, a nervous disorder seized her, by which Mr. Newton was obliged to submit to her being separated from him. During the twelve months it lasted, the weight of the affliction, added to his weight of years, seemed to overwhelm him. I extracted a few of his reflections on the occasion, written on some blank leaves in an edition of his "Letters to a Wife," which he lent me on my undertaking these Memoirs, and have subjoined them in a note.

August 1st, 1801. "I now enter my 77th year. I have been exercised this year with a trying and unexpected change—but it is by Your appointment, my gracious Lord, and You are unchangeably wise, good, and merciful. You gave me my dear adopted child, Betsy. You owned my endeavors to bring her up for You. I have no doubt that You have called her by Your grace. I thank You for the many years' comfort I have had in her; and for the attention and affection she has

always shown me, exceeding that of most daughters to their own parents.

"You have now tried me, as You did Abraham, in my old age; when my eyes are failing, and my strength declines. You have called for my 'Isaac', who had so long been my chief stay and staff—but it was Your blessing that made her so. A nervous disorder has seized her, and I desire to leave her under Your care; and chiefly pray for myself, that I may be enabled to wait Your time and will, without betraying any signs of impatience or despondency unfitting my profession and character.

"Hitherto You have helped me—and to You I look for help in future. Let all issue in Your glory, that my friends and hearers may be encouraged by seeing how You support me. Let Your strength be manifested in my weakness, and Your grace be sufficient for me, and let all finally work together for our good; Amen!

"I say from my heart, 'Not my will—but may Yours be done!' But, though You have in a measure made my spirit willing, You know, and I feel—that the flesh is weak. Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. Lord, I submit; subdue every rebellions thought that dares arise against Your holy will. Spare my ever-weakening eyes, if it pleases You—but, above all, strengthen my faith and love."

It may give the reader pleasure to be informed that Miss Catlett returned home, gradually recovered, and afterwards married a worthy man of the name of Smith.

It was with a mixture of delight and surprise, that the friends and hearers of this eminent servant of God beheld him bringing forth such a measure of *fruit in extreme old age*. Though then almost eighty years old, His sight nearly gone, and incapable, through

deafness, of joining in conversation—yet his public ministry was regularly continued, and maintained with a considerable degree of his former animation. His memory, indeed, was observed to fail—but his judgment in divine things still remained; and, through some depression of spirits was observed, which he used to account for from his advanced age; yet his perception, taste, and zeal for the truths which he had long received and taught were evident. Like Simeon, having seen the salvation of the Lord, he now only waited and prayed to depart in peace.

After Mr. Newton was turned eighty, some of his friends feared he might continue his public ministrations too long. They marked not only his infirmities in the pulpit—but felt much on account of the decrease of his strength, and of his occasional depressions. Conversing with him in January 1806 on the latter, he observed, that he had experienced nothing which in the least affected the principles he had felt and taught; that his depressions were the natural result fourscore years; and that, at any age, we can only enjoy that comfort from our principles, which God is pleased to send. "But," replied I, "in the article of public preaching, might it not be best to consider your work as done, and stop before you evidently discover you can speak no longer?"

"I cannot stop," said he, raising his voice. "What! shall the *old African blasphemer* stop while he can speak?"

In every future visit, I perceived old age making rapid strides. At length his friends found some difficulty in making themselves known to him; his sight, his hearing, and his recollection exceedingly failed—but, being mercifully kept from pain, he generally appeared easy and cheerful. Whatever he uttered was perfectly consistent with the principles which he had so long and so honorably maintained.

Calling to see him a few days before he died, with one of his most intimate friends, we could not make him recollect either of us—but, seeing him afterwards when sitting up in his chair, I found so much intellect remaining, as produced a short and affectionate reply, though he was utterly incapable of conversation.

Mr. Newton declined in this very gradual way, until at length it was painful to ask him a question, or to attempt to rouse faculties almost gone; still his friends were anxious to get a word from him, and those friends who survive him will be as anxious to learn the state of his mind in his last hours. It is quite natural thus to inquire, though it is not important, how such a godly character left this world. I have heard Mr. Newton say when he has heard particular inquiry made about the last expressions of an eminent Christian, "Tell me not how the man *died*—but how he *lived!*" Still, I say, it is natural to inquire; and I will meet the desire; not by trying to expand uninteresting particulars—but so far as I can collect encouraging facts; and I learn from a paper, kindly sent me by his family, all that is interesting and authentic.

About a month before Mr. Newton's death, Mr. Smith's niece was sitting by him, to whom he said, "It is a great thing to die; and, when flesh and heart fail, to have God for the strength of our heart, and our portion forever. I know whom I have believed, and he is able to keep that which I have committed against that great day. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day!"

When Mrs. Smith came into the room, he said, "I have been meditating on a subject: Come, and hear, all you that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul."

At another time he said, "More light, more love, more liberty! Hereafter, I hope, when I shut my eyes on the things of time, I shall open them in a better world. What a thing it is to live under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty! I am going the way of all flesh! And when one replied, "The Lord is gracious," he answered, "If it were not so, how could I dare to stand before him?"

The Wednesday before he died, Mrs. G____ asked him if his mind was comfortable; he replied, "I am satisfied with the Lord's will."

Mr. Newton seemed sensible to his last hour—but expressed nothing remarkable after these words. he departed on the 21st of December, 1807, and was buried in the vault of his church the 31st, having left the following injunction in a letter for the direction of his executors.

"I propose writing an epitaph for myself, if it may be put up, on a plain marble tablet, near the vestry door, to the following purpose:

JOHN NEWTON, CLERK,

Once an Infidel and Libertine,
A Servant of Slaves in Africa,
Was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior
JESUS CHRIST,
Preserved, restored, pardoned,
And appointed to preach the Faith
He had long labored to destroy,
Nearly 16 years at Olney in Bucks;
And ____ years in this church.
On Feb. 1, 1750, he married MARY
Daughter of the late George Catlett, of Chatham, Kent.
He resigned her to the Lord who gave her,
On 15th December, 1790.

"And I earnestly desire that no other monument, and no inscription but to this purpose, may be attempted for me."

The following is a copy of the exordium of Mr. Newton's will dated June 13, 1803.

"In the name of God, Amen. I, JOHN NEWTON, of the city of London, being through mercy in good health, and a sound and disposing mind, memory, and understanding although in the seventy eighth year of my age, do, for the settling of my temporal concerns, and for the disposal of all the worldly estate which it has pleased the Lord in His good providence to give me—make this my last Will and Testament as follows.

I commit my **soul** to my gracious God and Savior, who mercifully spared and preserved me, when I was an apostate, a blasphemer, and an infidel, and delivered me from that state of misery on the coast of Africa into which my obstinate wickedness had plunged me; and who has been pleased to admit me (though most unworthy) to preach His glorious Gospel. I rely with humble confidence upon the atonement and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, God and Man; which I have often proposed to others as the only Foundation whereon a sinner can build his hope; trusting that he will guard and guide me through the uncertain remainder of my life, and that he will then admit me into his presence in his heavenly kingdom.

I would have my **body** deposited in the vault under the parish church of St. Mary church, close to the coffins of my late dear wife and my dear niece Elizabeth Cunningham; and it is my desire that my funeral may be performed with as little expense as possible, consistent with decency."

Review of Mr. Newton's Character

There seems to be little need of giving a general character of Mr. Newton after the particulars which appear in the foregoing Memoirs. He unquestionably was a child of a peculiar Providence, in every step of his progress; and his deep sense of the extraordinary dispensation through which he had passed was the prominent topic in his conversation. Those, who personally knew the man, could have no doubt of the probity with which his "Narrative" (singular as it may appear) was written. They, however, who could not view the subject of these Memoirs so nearly as his particular friends did, may wish to learn something further of his character with respect to:

his Literature,
his Ministry,
his Family Habits,
his Writings,
his Familiar Conversation.

1. Of his LITERATURE, we learn from his "Narrative" what he attained in the learned languages; and that, by almost incredible efforts. Few men have undertaken such difficulties under such disadvantages. It, therefore, seems more extraordinary, that he should have attained so much, than that he should not have acquired more. Nor did he quit his pursuits of this kind—but in order to gain that knowledge which he deemed much more important. Whatever he conceived had a tendency to qualify him, as a scribe well instructed in the kingdom of God, bringing out of his treasury things new and old—I say, in pursuit of this point, he might have adopted the Apostle's expression, "One thing I do!" By a principle so simply and firmly directed, he furnished his mind with much information; he had consulted the best old divines; had read the moderns of

reputation with avidity; and was continually watching whatever might serve for analogies or illustrations in the service of true religion. "A minister," he used to say, "wherever he is, should be always in his study. He should look at every man, and at everything, as capable of affording him some instruction." His mind, therefore, was ever intent on his calling—ever extracting something, even from the basest materials, which he could turn into *gold*.

In consequence of this incessant attention to this object, while many whose early advantages greatly exceeded his might excel him in the knowledge and investigation of some curious, abstract—but very unimportant points—he vastly excelled them in points of infinitely higher importance to man. In the knowledge of God, of his Word, and of the human heart in its needs and resources, Newton would have unique stood among mere scholars. I might say the same of some others, who have set out late in the profession—but who, with a portion of Mr. Newton's piety and ardor, have greatly outstripped those who have had every early advantage and encouragement. Men with specious titles and high connections have received the rewards; while men, like Newton, without them, have done the work.

2. With respect to his MINISTRY, he appeared, perhaps, to least advantage in the pulpit; as he did not generally aim at accuracy in the composition of his sermons, nor at any address in the delivery of them. His utterance was far from clear, and his attitudes ungraceful. He possessed, however, so much affection for his people, and so much zeal for their best interests, that the defect of his manner was of little consideration with his constant hearers; at the same time, his capacity and habit of entering into their trials and experience gave the highest interest to his ministry among them. Besides which, he frequently interspersed the most brilliant allusions; and brought forward such happy illustrations of his subject, and those with so

much unction on his own heart, as melted and enlarged theirs. The *parent-like tenderness and affection* which accompanied his instructions, made them prefer him to preachers who, on other accounts, were much more generally popular.

It ought also to be noted, that, amidst the extravagant notions and unscriptural positions which have sometimes disgraced the religious world, Mr. Newton never departed, in any instance, from soundly and seriously promulgating the faith once delivered to the saints; of which his writings will remain the best evidence. His doctrine was strictly that of the Church of England, urged on the consciences of men in the most practical and experimental manner. "I hope," said he one day to me, smiling, "I hope I am upon the whole a SCRIPTURAL preacher; for I find I am considered as an Arminian among the high Calvinists, and as a Calvinist among the strenuous Arminians."

I never observed anything like *bigotry* in his ministerial character; though he seemed at all times to appreciate the beauty of order, and its good effects in the ministry. He had formerly been intimately connected with some highly respectable ministers among the Dissenters, and retained a cordial regard for many to the last. He considered the strong prejudices which attach to both Churchmen and Dissenters, as arising more from *education* than from *principle*. But, being himself both a clergyman and an incumbent in the Church of England, he wished to be consistent. In public, therefore, he felt he could not join with some ministers whom he thought truly good men, and to whom he cordially wished success in their endeavors; and he patiently met the consequence. They called him a bigot; and he, in return, prayed for them, that they might not be really such.

I have known him, whenever he felt it necessary, produce admirable plans for the pulpit. I own his judgment deficient, in not deeming such preparation necessary at all times. I have sat in pain, when he has spoken unguardedly in this way before young ministers; men who, with but comparatively slight degrees of his information and experience, would draw encouragement to ascend the pulpit—with but little previous study of their subject. A minister is not to be blamed, who cannot rise to qualifications which some of his brethren have attained—but he is certainly bound to improve his own talent to the utmost of his power; he is not to cover his sloth, his love of company—with the pretense of depending entirely on Divine influence. Timothy had as good ground at least for expecting such influence as any of his successors in the ministry; and yet the Apostle admonishes him to give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine—to neglect not the gift that was in him—to meditate upon these things—to give himself WHOLLY to them, that his profiting might appear to all.

Mr. Newton regularly preached on the Sunday morning and evening, and also on the Wednesday morning. After he was turned of seventy he often undertook to assist other clergymen; sometimes, even to the preaching of six sermons in the space of a week! What was more extraordinary, he continued his usual course of preaching at his own church after he was eighty years old, and that when he could no longer see to read his text! His memory and voice sometimes failed him—but it was remarked, that, at this great age, he was nowhere more recollected or lively than in the pulpit. He was punctual as to time with his congregation. Every first Sunday evening in the month he preached on relative duties. Mr. Alderman Lea regularly sent his carriage to convey him to the church, and Mr. Bates sent his servant to attend him in the pulpit; which friendly assistance was continued until Mr. Newton could appear no longer in public.

His *ministerial visits* were exemplary. I do not recollect one, though favored with many, in which his general information and lively genius did not communicate instruction, and his affectionate and condescending sympathy did not leave comfort.

Truth demands it should be said, that he did not always administer consolation, nor give an account of characters, with sufficient discrimination. His talent did not lie in discerning of spirits. I never saw him so much moved, as when any friend endeavored to correct his errors in this respect. His *credulity* seemed to arise from the consciousness he had of his own integrity; and from that sort of parental fondness which he bore to all his friends, real or pretended. I knew one, since dead, whom he thus described, while living; "He is certainly an odd man, and has his failings—but he has great integrity, and I hope he is going to heaven." Whereas, almost all who knew him, thought the man should go first into the pillory!

3. In his FAMILY, Mr. Newton might be admired more safely than imitated. His excessive attachment to Polly is so fully displayed in his "Narrative," and confirmed in the two volumes he thought it proper to publish, entitled "*Letters to a Wife*," that the reader will need no information on this subject. Some of his friends wished this excessive attachment had been cast more into the shade; as tending to furnish a spur, where human nature generally needs a curb. He used, indeed, to speak of such attachments, in the abstract, as *idolatry*; though his own was providentially ordered to be the main hinge on which his preservation and deliverance turned, while in his worst state. Good men, however, cannot be too cautious how they give sanction, by their expressions or example, to a passion which, when not under sober regulation, has overwhelmed not only families—but states, with disgrace and ruin.

With his unusual degree of benevolence and affection, it was not extraordinary that the spiritual interests of his servants were brought forward, and examined severally every Sunday afternoon; nor that, being treated like children, they should grow old in his service. In short, Mr. Newton could live no longer than he could love; it is no wonder, therefore, if his nieces had more of his heart than is generally afforded to their own children by the fondest parents. It has already been mentioned that his house was an asylum for the perplexed or afflicted. Young ministers were peculiarly the objects of his attention; he instructed them; he encouraged them; he warned them; and might truly be said to be a father in Christ, spending and being spent for the interest of his church. In order thus to execute the various avocations of the day, he used to rise early; he seldom was found abroad in the evening, and was exact in his appointments.

4. Of his WRITINGS, I think little needs to be said here; they are in wide circulation, and best speak for themselves. An able editor is now employed in adding some posthumous pieces, left for publication by the author. After which, the whole will appear in a complete set, with a reduced copy of the admirable portrait of Mr. Newton lately published by Mr. Smith, engraved from an original painting by J. Russell. I hope to see a fuller and more accurate account of these writings published by the editor, should the executors deem it necessary. At present, therefore, what I shall observe upon them will be but general and cursory.

The "Sermons" which Mr. Newton published at Liverpool, after being refused on his first application for orders, were intended to show what he would have preached, had he been admitted; they are highly creditable to his understanding and to his heart. His "Review of Ecclesiastical History," so far as it proceeded, has been much esteemed. Before this, the world seems to have lost sight of a history

of real Christianity; and to have been content with what, for the most part, was but an account of the ambition and politics of secular men, assuming the Christian name.

It must be evident to anyone who observes the spirit of all his sermons, hymns, tracts, etc. that nothing is aimed at which should be met by critical investigation. In the preface to his Hymns, he remarks, "Though I would not offend readers of taste by a willful coarseness and negligence, I do not write professedly for them. I have simply declared my own views and feelings, as I might have done if I had composed hymns in some of the newly discovered islands in the South Sea, where no person had any knowledge of the name of Jesus but myself."

To dwell, therefore, with a critical eye on this part of his public character, would be absurd and impertinent; it would be to erect a tribunal to which he seems not amenable. He appears to have paid no regard to a nice ear, or an accurate reviewer—but, preferring a style at once neat and perspicuous, to have laid out himself entirely for the service of the church of God, and more especially for the tried and experienced part of its members.

His chief excellence, as a writer, seemed to lie in the easy and natural style of his correspondence. His letters will be read while real religion exists; and they are the best draught of his own mind.

He had so largely communicated with his friends in this way, that I have heard him say, he thought, if his letters were collected, they would make several folios. He selected many of these for publication; and expressed a hope that no other person would take that liberty with the rest, which were so widely spread abroad. In this, however, he was disappointed and grieved; as he once remarked to me; and for which reason I do not annex any letters that I received from him. He

esteemed that collection published under the title of "Cardiphonia" as the most useful of his writings, and mentioned various instances of the benefits which he heard they had conveyed to many.

His "Apologia," or Defense of Conformity, was written on occasion of some reflections (perhaps only jocular) cast on him at that time. His "Letters to a Wife," written during his three voyages to Africa, and published in 1793, have been received with less satisfaction than most of his other writings. While, however, his advanced age and inordinate fondness may be pleaded for this publication, care should be taken lest men fall into a contrary extreme; and suppose that temper to be their wisdom, which leads them to avoid another, which they consider as his weakness. But his "Messiah," before mentioned—his Letters of the Rev. Mr. Vanlier, Chaplain at the Cape—his Memoirs of the Rev. John Cowper (brother to the poet), and those of the Rev. Mr. Grimshaw, of Yorkshire—together with his single sermons and tracts—have been well received, and will remain a public benefit.

I recollect reading a MS. which Mr. Newton lent me, containing a correspondence that had passed between himself and the Mr. Dixon, Principal of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford; and another MS. of a correspondence between him and the late Martin Madan. They would have been very interesting to the public, particularly the latter; and were striking evidences of Mr. Newton's humility, piety, and faithfulness—but reasons of delicacy led him to commit the whole to the flames.

To speak of his writings in the mass, they certainly possess what many have aimed at—but very few attained, namely, originality. They are the *language of the heart*; they show a deep experience of its

religious feelings; a continual concern to sympathize with man in his needs, and to direct him to his only resources.

5. His LIFE, and familiar habits with his friends, were more peculiar, amusing, and instructive, than any I ever witnessed. It is difficult to convey a clear idea of them by description. I venture, therefore, to add a few pages of what I may call his Table-Talk; which I took down at different times, both in company and in private, from his lips. Such a collection of printed remarks will not bare so much point as when spoken in connection with the occasions that produced them; they must appear to considerable disadvantage thus detached; and candid allowance should be made by the reader, on this account. They, however, who had the privilege of Mr. Newton's conversation when living, cannot but recognize the speaker in most of them, and derive both profit and pleasure from these remains of their late valuable friend; and such as had not, will (if I do not mistake) think them the most valuable part of this book.

Remarks made by Mr. Newton, in familiar conversation

"If an angel were sent to find the most perfect man, he would probably not find him composing a theological treatise—but perhaps a cripple in a poor-house, whom the church despised; a man humbled before God, with far lower thoughts of himself than others have of him."

"When a Christian goes into the world, because he sees it is his *call*—yet, while he feels it also his *cross*, it will not hurt him."

"Satan will seldom come to a Christian with a gross temptation; a green log and a candle may be safely left together—but bring a few

shavings, then some small sticks, and then larger—and you may soon bring the green log to ashes."

"If two angels came down from heaven to execute a Divine command, and one was appointed to conduct an empire, and the other to sweep a street—they would feel no inclination to choose employments."

"What some call *providential openings* are often *powerful temptations*. The heart, in wandering, cries, 'Here is a way opened before me;' but, perhaps, not to be trodden—but rejected."

"Young people marry, as others study navigation, by the fire-side. If they marry unsuitably, they can scarcely bring things to rule—but, like sailors, they must sail as near the wind as they can. I feel myself like a traveler with his wife in his chaise; if the ground is smooth, and she keeps the right pace, and is willing to deliver the reins when I ask for them, I am always willing to let her drive."

"A Christian should never plead spirituality for being a sloven; if he is but a shoe-cleaner, he should be the best in the parish."

"My course of study, like that of a surgeon, has principally consisted in walking the hospital."

"My principal method of defeating heresy, is—by establishing truth. One proposes to fill a bushel with tares; now, if I can fill it first with wheat, I shall defy his attempts."

"When some people talk of 'religion'—they mean they have heard so many sermons, and performed so many devotions; and thus mistake the *means* for the *end*. But true religion is a habitual recollection of God and intention to serve him—and this turns everything into gold!

We are apt to suppose that we need something splendid to evince our devotion—but true devotion levels all things; washing plates, and cleaning shoes, is a high office, if performed in a right spirit. If three angels were sent to earth, they would feel perfect indifference who should perform the part of prime minister, parish minister, or watchman."

"When a ship goes to sea, among a vast variety of its articles and circumstances there is but one object regarded; namely, doing the business of the voyage; every bucket is employed with respect to that."

"Many have puzzled themselves about the origin of evil; I observe there is evil, and that there is a way to escape it—and with this I begin and end!"

"Consecrated things, under the Law, were first sprinkled with blood, and then anointed with oil, and thenceforward were no more common. Every Christian has been a common vessel for profane purposes—but, when sprinkled and anointed, under the Gospel, he becomes separated and consecrated to God."

"I would not give a straw for that assurance which sin will not dampen. If David had come from his adultery, and had talked of his assurance at that time, I would have despised his speech."

"A spirit of adoption is the spirit of a child; he may disoblige his father—yet he is not afraid of being turned out of doors. The *union* is not dissolved, though the *communion* is. He is not well with his father; therefore must be unhappy, as their interests are inseparable."

"A Christian in the world, is like a man who has had a long friendship with one whom at length he finds to have been the murderer of his kind father. The friendship, after this, will surely be broken."

"Candor will always allow much for inexperience. I have been thirty years forming my own views; and, in the course of this time, some of my hills have sunk—and some of my valleys have risen—but, how unreasonable would it be to expect that all this should take place in another person; and that, in the course of a year or two."

"Candor forbids us to estimate a character from his *accidental blots*. Yet it is thus that David, and others, have been treated."

"There is the analogy of faith; it is a master-key, which not only opens particular doors—but carries you through the whole house. But an attachment to a rigid system is dangerous. Luther once turned out the Epistle of James, because it disturbed his system. I shall preach, perhaps, very usefully upon two opposite texts, while kept apart—but, if I attempt nicely to reconcile them, it is ten to one that I begin to bungle."

"We are surprised at the fall of a famous professor—but, in the sight of God, the man was gone before; we, only, have now first discovered it. He who despises small things—shall fall by little and little."

"There are critical times of danger. After great services, honors, and consolations, we should stand upon our guard. Noah, Lot, David and Solomon, fell in these circumstances. Satan is a robber; a robber will not attack a man in going to the Bank—but in returning with his pocket full of money."

"A Christian is like a young nobleman, who, on going to receive his estate, is at first enchanted with its prospects; this, in a course of

time, may wear off—but a sense of the value of the estate grows daily."

"When we first enter into the divine life, we propose to grow rich; God's plan is to make us feel poor."

"Good men have need to take heed of building upon groundless impressions. Mr. Whitfield had a son, whom he imagined born to be a very extraordinary man—but the son soon died, and the father was cured of his mistake."

"Christ has taken our nature into heaven, to represent us; and has left us on earth, with his nature, to represent him."

"Worldly men will be true to their principles; and if we were as true to our principles, the visits between the two parties would be short and seldom."

"A Christian in the world, is like a man transacting his affairs in the rain. He will not suddenly leave his client because it rains—but, the moment the business is done, he is gone! As it is said in the *Acts*, Being let go, they went to their own company."

"The Scriptures are so full, that every case may be found in them. A profligate went into a church, and tried to decoy a girl, by saying, 'Why do you attend to such stuff as these Scriptures?' 'Because,' said she, 'they tell me, that, in the last days, there shall come such scoffers as you.'"

"God deals with us as we do with our children; he first *speaks*; then, gives a *gentle stroke*; at last, a *blow*."

"The religion of a sinner stands on two pillars; namely, what Christ did *for* us in his flesh—and what he performs *in* us by his Spirit. Most

errors arise from an attempt to separate these two."

"Man is not taught anything effectually, until God becomes his teacher; and then the glare of the world is put out, and the value of the soul rises in full view. A man's present sentiments may not be accurate—but we make too much of sentiments. We pass a field with a few blades; we call it a field of wheat; yet here is no wheat in perfection—but wheat is sown, and full ears may be expected."

"The word Temperance, in the New Testament, signifies self-possession; it is a disposition suitable to one who has a race to run, and therefore will not load his pockets with lead."

"I endeavor to walk through the world as a physician goes through Bedlam; the patients make a noise, pester him with impudence, and hinder him in his business—but he does the best he can, and so gets through."

"A man always in society, is one always on the spend; on the other hand, a mere solitary is, at his best—but a candle in an empty room."

"If we were upon the watch for improvement, the common news of the day would furnish it; the falling of the tower in Siloam, and the slaughter of the Galileans, were the news of the day, which our Lord improved."

"The generality make out their righteousness, by comparing themselves with some others whom they think worse. A woman of the town, who was dying of disease in the hospital, was offended at a minister speaking to her as a *sinner*, because she had never picked a pocket."

"Take away a toy from a child and give him another, and he is satisfied—but if he is hungry, no toy will do. As new-born babes, true believers desire the sincere milk of the Word. And the desire of grace, in this way, is grace."

One said, that the great Saints in the Calendar were many of them poor sinners. Mr. Newton replied, "They were poor saints indeed, if they did not feel that they were great sinners."

"The force of what we deliver from the pulpit is often lost by a starched, and what is frequently called a correct, style; and, especially, by adding meretricious ornaments. I called upon a lady who had been robbed, and she gave me a striking account of the fact—but had she put it into *heroics*, I would neither so well have understood her, nor been so well convinced that she had been robbed."

"When a man says he received a blessing under a sermon, I begin to inquire the character of the man who speaks—of the help he has received."

"The Lord has reasons far beyond our view, for opening a wide door, while he stops the mouth of a useful preacher. John Bunyan would not have done half the good he did, if he had remained preaching in Bedford, instead of being shut up in Bedford prison."

"Ministers over-rate their labors, if they did not think it worth while to be born, and spend ten thousand years in labor and contempt, to recover one soul."

"Don't tell me of your feelings. A traveler would be glad of fine weather—but, if he be a man of business, he will go on. Bunyan says, you must not judge of a man's haste by his horse; for when the horse

can hardly move, you may see, by the rider's urging him, what a hurry he is in."

"A man and a beast may stand upon the same mountain, and even touch one another; yet they are in two different worlds. The beast perceives nothing but the grass—but the man contemplates the delightful prospect, and thinks of a thousand remote things. Thus a Christian may be solitary at a full exchange; he can converse with the people there upon trade, politics, and the stocks—but they cannot talk with him upon the peace of God which passes all understanding."

"It is a mere fallacy to talk of the sins of a short life. The sinner is always a sinner. Put a cup into a river; you may draw out some water—but the river remains."

"Professors, who own the doctrines of free grace, often act inconsistently with their own principle when they are angry at the defects of others. A company of travelers fall into a pit; one of them gets a passenger to draw him out. Now he should not be angry with the rest for falling in; nor because they are not yet out, as he is. He did not pull himself out; instead, therefore, of *reproaching* them—he should show them *pity*. A man, truly saved, will no more despise others, than Bartimeus, after his own eyes were opened—would take a stick, and beat every blind man he met!"

"We much mistake, in supposing that the removal of a particular objection would satisfy the objector. Suppose I am in bed, and want to know whether it is light, it is not enough if I draw back the curtain; for though there is light—I must have *eyes* to see it."

"Too deep a consideration of eternal realities might unfit a man for his present circumstances. Walking through St. Bartholomew's

Hospital, or Bedlam, must deeply affect a feeling mind—but, in reality, this world is a far worse scene. It has but two wards; in the one, men are miserable; in the other, mad."

"Some preachers near Olney dwelt on the doctrine of predestination; an old woman said, 'Ah! I have long settled that point; for, if God had not chosen me before I was born, I am sure he would have seen nothing in me to have chosen me for afterwards.'"

"I see the unprofitableness of controversy in the case of Job and his friends; for, if God had not interposed, had they lived to this day, they would have continued the dispute."

"It is pure mercy that God refuses a particular request. A miser would pray very earnestly for gold, if he believed prayer would gain it; whereas, if Christ had any favor to him, he would take his gold away. A child walks in the garden in spring, and sees cherries; he knows they are good fruit, and therefore asks for them. 'No, my dear,' says the father, 'they are not yet ripe; wait until the season.'"

"If I cannot take *pleasure* in infirmities, I can sometimes feel the *profit* of them. I can conceive a king to pardon a rebel, and take him into his family, and then say, 'I appoint you, for a season, to wear a fetter. At a certain season, I will send a messenger to knock it off. In the mean time, this fetter will serve to remind you of your state; it may humble you, and restrain you from rambling.'"

"Some Christians, at a glance, seem of a superior order, and are not; they want a certain quality. At a florists' feast the other day, a certain flower was determined to bear the bell—but it was found to be an artificial flower; there is a quality, called GROWTH, which it had not."

"I measure ministers by square measure. I have no idea of the size of a table, if you only tell me how long it is—but, if you also say how wide, I can tell its dimensions. So, when you tell me what a man is in the pulpit, you must also tell me what he is out of it, or I shall not know his size."

"Much depends on the way we come into trouble. Paul and Jonah were both in a storm—but in very different circumstances."

"I have read of many wicked popes—but the worst pope I ever met with is POPE SELF!"

"The people of this world are like children. Offer a child an candy and a bank note, he will doubtless choose the candy."

"The heir of a great estate, while a child, thinks more of a few dollars in his pocket than of his inheritance. So a Christian is often more elated by some frame of heart than by his title to glory."

"A dutiful child is ever looking forward to the holidays, when he shall return to his father—but he does not think of running from school before."

"Man is made capable of three births; by nature, he enters into the present world; by grace, into spiritual light and life; by death, into glory."

"I feel like a man who has no money in his pocket—but is allowed to draw for all he needs upon one infinitely rich. I am therefore, at once both a beggar and a rich man."

"I went one day to Mrs. G——'s, just after she had lost all her fortune. I could not be surprised to find her in tears—but she said, 'I suppose you think I am crying for my loss—but that is not the case; I

am now weeping to think I should feel so much uneasiness on the account.' After that I never heard her speak again upon the subject as long as she lived. Now this is just as it should be. Suppose a man was going to York to take possession of a large estate, and his chaise should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we would think him, if we saw him wringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, 'My chaise is broken! My chaise is broken!'"

"I have many books that I cannot sit down to read; they are, indeed, good and sound—but, like halfpence, there goes a great quantity to a little amount. There are *silver* books; and a very few *golden* books—but I have one book worth more than all, called the Bible; and that is a book of bank-notes!"

I conclude these remarks, not because my memorandum-book is exhausted—but lest the reader should think I forget the old maxim, *ne quid nimis*. No undue liberty, however, has been taken in publishing Mr. Newton's private conversation, since all the above remarks were submitted to him as intended for this publication, and were approved.

General Observations

The difference of mental improvement among men seems very much to depend on their capacity and habit of gathering instruction from the objects which are continually presented to their observation. Two men behold the same fact; one of them is in the habit of drawing such remarks and inferences as the fact affords, and learns somewhat from everything he sees; while the other sees the same fact, and perhaps with a momentary admiration—but lets it pass

without making so much as one profitable reflection on the occasion. The excursions of the *bee* and the *butterfly* present an exact emblem of these two characters.

I have present to my mind an acquaintance, who has seen more of the outside of the world than most men; he has lived in most countries of the civilized world; yet I scarcely know a man of a less improved mind; with every external advantage, he has learned nothing to any useful purpose; he seems to have passed from flower to flower without extracting a drop of honey; and, now, he tires all his friends with the frivolous garrulity of a capricious, vacant, and petulant *old age*.

I wish the reader of these Memoirs may avoid such an error in passing over the history here laid before him. An extraordinary train of facts is presented to his observation; and if "the proper study of mankind is man," the history before us will surely furnish important matter of the kind to the eye of every wise, Christian traveler.

I would here call the attention of three classes of men to a single point of prime importance; namely, the **Efficacy and Excellency of Real Christianity**, as exhibited in the principles and practice of the subject of these Memoirs.

I. Unhappiness with an evil heart of unbelief.

Suppose the reader to be so unhappy (though his misfortune may be least perceived by himself) as to be led astray by bad friends, in conjunction with an evil heart of unbelief. I will suppose him to be now in the state in which Mr. Newton describes himself formerly to have been, and in which also the writer of these Memoirs once was. I will suppose him to be given up to believe his own lie; and that he may be in the habit of thinking that God, when he made man, left

him to find his way without any express revelation of the mind and will of his Maker and Governor; or, at most, that he is left to the only rule in morals, which *nature* may be supposed to present. What that way is, which such a thinker will take, is sufficiently evident from the general course and habits of unbelievers.

But there is a *conscience* in man. Conscience, in sober moments, often alarms the most stout-hearted. When such an unbeliever meets an overwhelming providence, or lies on a death-bed, he will probably awake to a strong sense of his real condition. He will feel, if not very hardened indeed, in what a forlorn, unprovided, and dangerous state he exists. Life is the only moment in which this *skeptical presumption* can continue; and when it is terminating, where is he to set the sole of his foot? He wildly contemplates the book or *nature*, in which he may have been persuaded that man may read all he needs to know—but the forlorn outcast sees nothing there to meet his case as a sinner. Infinite power, wisdom, contrivance, general provision, alone appear—but nothing of that further and distinct information which a dying offender needs. He needs footing, and finds none. He needs the hand of a friend to grasp—but none is seen.

Possibilities shock his apprehension. He may, perhaps, discern that the present system has a moral government, which frowns upon guilt; and, for anything he knows to the contrary, the next scene may present a Judge upon his throne of justice—this world, his present idol, vanished like smoke, and the living and the dead called to give their account. Where then is he? He is a mass of guilt and wretchedness. All this, I say, may be, for anything he knows to the contrary. But the express and well-authenticated Revelation, which that Judge has sent to man, tells us plainly that all this shall be, and that every eye shall behold it!

"Be it so," such a reader may reply; "still I am what I am. My habits of *thinking* are fixed; and I perceive my habits of *life* can only be borne out by my profession of unbelief. Both are now inveterate. Nor do I see, all things considered, what can be done in my case. How can I adopt the Christian Revelation? And what could it do for me, if I could?"

I answer, by calling your attention to the fact before us. What was the case of John Newton? Could any one be more deeply sunk in depravity, in profligacy, in infidelity, than he? Can you even conceive a rational creature more degraded, or more hardened in his evil habits? Would you attempt to recover such a mind, by arguments drawn from the advantage which *virtue* has over *vice*? or by rousing his attention to the duties of natural religion, or to the possible consequences of a future retribution? He would have gone on thinking he had made the most of his circumstances, in his practice of catching fish, and eating them almost raw. He would sullenly have proceeded to sleep through the drying of his one shirt, which he had just washed on the rock, and put on wet. He would, with a savage ferocity, have watched an opportunity for murdering his master. He would have drowned all reflection in a drunken revel; and would have overwhelmed all remonstrance, by belching out new-invented blasphemies; and then sought to rush headlong, in a drunken paroxysm, into the ocean.

Here is, certainly, presented the utmost pitch of a depraved and degraded nature; nor does it seem possible for Satan to carry his point further with a man—EXCEPT in one single instance, namely, by the final disbelief of God's remedy.

Now, by God's help, this Divine remedy was applied, and its efficacy demonstrated; of which there are thousands of living witnesses. A

plain matter of fact is before us. It pleased God, that, by a train of dispensations, this prodigal should come to himself. He is made to feel his needs and misery; he follows the light shining in a dark place; he calls for help; he is made willing to follow his guide; he proceeds with implicit confidence. And now let us examine to what, at length, he is brought; and by what means.

I speak of a matter of fact. Where is he brought? He is brought from the basest, meanest, under-trodden state of slavery—from a state of mind still more degraded, being foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating—lacking nothing of a complete devil but his powers. This man is brought, I say, to be a faithful and zealous servant of his God—an able and laborious minister of Christ—a useful and benevolent friend to his neighbor—wise to secure the salvation of his own soul, and wise to win the souls of others.

Consider also the MEANS by which he was brought. It was not by the arguments of philosophists, or the rational considerations of what is called natural religion. Mr. Newton's own account informs us, that the peculiar discoveries of Scriptural Truth gradually broke in upon his mind; until, at length, he was made sensible that there was a remedy provided in the Gospel, and which was fully sufficient to meet even his case; and he found that, and that only, to be the power of God unto salvation.

The result, therefore, which should be drawn from these premises, is the following. There exists a desperate disorder in the world, called Sin. Heathens, as well as Christians, have marked its malignant influence; they have tried various expedients, which have been prescribed for its cure; or its mitigation, at least—but no means have been discovered, which have availed to the relief of so much as a

single individual, except God's own appointed means. Yet, strange to say, this remedy of God's own appointment, to which only he has promised a peculiar blessing, and by which he is daily recovering men in the most desperate circumstances who actually employ it—strange to say, this remedy still remains a stumbling-block—is counted foolishness—inasmuch that many will rather dash this cup of salvation from the lips of a profligate, like Newton, when disposed to receive it, than that he should obtain relief in that way. Their conduct seems to say, "Rather let such a wretch go on in his profligacy, than the Gospel be acknowledged to be the wisdom and the power of God."

Not that the case of Mr. Newton, here presented to the consideration of an unbeliever, is brought forward as if the Gospel needed any further evidence, or has occasion for facts of our own time to give it additional authenticity—but we are directed to regard the cloud of witnesses, among which our departed brother was distinguished; and, though now dead—yet speaks. May the reader have ears to hear the important report!

Does, therefore, the question return, as to what the unbeliever should do? Let him, after seriously considering what is here advanced, consider also, what conduct is befitting a responsible, or at least a rational, creature? Surely it befits such a one to avoid all means of stifling the voice of conscience, whenever it begins to speak—to regard the voice of God—yet speaking to him in the Revelation of his grace; and that, much more humbly and seriously than such people are accustomed to do. It befits him, if he has any regard to the interest of his own soul, or the souls of his fellow-creatures, to give no countenance, by his declarations or example, to the senseless cavils and indecent scoffs, by which the *profligate* aim to cloak the

disorders of their hearts—by which vanity aims at distinction, and half-thinkers affect depth.

The person I am now speaking to, cannot but observe how much the *judgment* becomes the *dupe* of the passions. If the veil is upon the heart, it will be upon everything. We need not only an *object* presented—but an organ of sight, to discern it. Now the Gospel alone affords both these. Mr. Newton becomes an instructive example, in this respect, to the unbeliever. "One of the first helps," says he, "which I received," in consequence of a determination to examine the New Testament more carefully, "was from Luke 6:13, "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children—how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? I had been sensible, that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when, in reality, I did not believe his history, was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God! But, here I found the Holy Spirit spoken of, who was to be communicated to those who ask. Upon this I reasoned thus; If this book is true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise; I have need of that very Spirit by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask; and, if it is of God—he will make good his own word."

A man, therefore, who is found in this unhappy state—but not judicially hardened in it, should mark this stage of Mr. Newton's recovery; and attend to the facts and evidences of the power and excellency of real religion, such as this before him. He should appreciate that Gospel, which it has pleased God to employ as his instrument for displaying the wonders of his might in the spiritual world. He should pray that he may experience the power of it in his own heart, and thus not lose the additional benefit of the cases presented to him in Memoirs like these; a case, probably, far

exceeding his own in the malignity of its symptoms. Let him also consider, that, while such convictions can produce no real loss to him, they may secure advantages beyond calculation. He may not be able, at present, to comprehend how godliness is profitable for all things, in having not only the promise of the life that now is—but of that which is to come—but he may see, as a rational creature, that, at the very lowest estimation, he has taken the safe side, by embracing the only hope set before him; and, on this ground, it is clearly demonstrable, that not only the grossest folly must attach to the rejecter of a Revelation attended with such accumulated evidences—but actual guilt also, and the highest ingratitude and presumption.

II. Religious character and principles.

But there is another class of men, to whom I would recommend a serious consideration of Mr. Newton's religious character and principles.

The people whom I am now addressing are convinced of the truth of Revelation, and some of them ably contend for it against unbelievers. They are also conscientious; they are often useful in society; and are sometimes found amiable and benevolent; they are even religious, according to their views of religion; and some of them are exact in their devotions. Yet, from certain morbid symptoms, they appear not to receive the grace of God in truth, nor to be cordially disposed to the spirit of the Gospel. So much apparent right intention and exemplary conduct seems, indeed, to demand respect—and a respect which some who possess more zeal than judgment do not duly pay them.

Ardelio despises his neighbor Eusebius's religious views and habits; and not only deems him a blind Pharisee—but has sometimes

expressed the sentiment in the rudest terms. This reminds me of the old story of Diogenes walking on the costly carpet of his brother philosopher, saying, "I trample on the pride of Plato." "Yes," said Plato, "but with greater pride, Diogenes."

If it be asked, "Why should any one judge unfavorably of such a character as Eusebius?" I answer, *we may charitably seek to convince one whom we have reason to think under fatal mistakes, without any disposition to judge or condemn him.* I meet a traveler, who is confidently pursuing a path which I have reason to believe is both wide of his mark and dangerous to his person; I may charitably attempt to direct his steps, without thinking in of his intention. It is recorded of our Lord, that he even loved a young man, who went away sorrowful on having his grand idol exposed.

"But why," it is asked, "should you suspect anything essentially wrong in such characters as you describe?" I reply, for the following reasons:

I have observed with much concern, when God has wrought such a mighty operation of grace in the heart of a man like NEWTON, that this man has not, upon such a saving change being wrought, suited the religious taste of the people just mentioned. They will, indeed, commend his external change of conduct—but will by no means relish his broken and contrite spirit, or his ascription of his salvation, to God's free and unmerited favor, and his counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, as that Lord who has thus called him from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. They will not relish the zeal and evangelical strain of his preaching; his endeavor to alarm a stupid, sleeping conscience, to probe a deceitful heart, to expose the wretchedness of the world, and to rend the veil from formality and hypocrisy! Nay, they will rather

prefer some dry moralist, or mere formalist, who, instead of having experienced any such change of heart, will rather revile it.

Again, I have observed a lamentable disposition of mind in such people to form false and unfavorable associations. They will pay too much attention to injurious representations, true or false, of a religious class of mankind, whom the world has branded with some general term of reproach. Two or three ignorant or extravagant fanatics shall be admitted to represent the religious world at large; it not being considered how much such offensive characters are actually grieving those whose cause I am pleading. No one, indeed, can have lived long in society—but he must needs have met the counterfeit of every excellence.

In the article of property, for instance, who is not on the watch lest he should be imposed on? And, while the love of property is so general, who is not studious to discover the difference between the true and the false? It will be so in religion, wherever there is the attention which its worth so imperiously demands. Love has a piercing eye, which will discover its object in a crowd. But, if there is this disposition to confound in the lump—both the precious with the vile, it is symptomatic of something morbid in the heart. We have reason to fear a latent aversion, in the people offended, from vital and spiritual religion; notwithstanding all the allowance that can be made for the prevailing prejudices of their education and circumstances.

And here, also, we cannot but lament the effect of such a disposition in those perverse conclusions which these people are often observed to draw from a sermon. Of the two handles which attach to everything, what must we think of that mind which is ever choosing the wrong. Our Lord, for instance, shows how much the farm, the

oxen, and the wife, became impediments in the way of those who refused his invitation—but a perverse conclusion would infer that he was, therefore, an enemy to lawful engagements. Candor, however, sees, at a glance, that this was not his design in speaking the parable. His drift was evidently to mark the state and spirit of the spurners; and not to discountenance their lawful occupations. He meant to show that even lawful pursuits may be unlawfully pursued, when they become sole objects, and are thus preferred to his inestimable proposal. It is thus the well-disposed hearer will mark the design of his minister; and draw wholesome nourishment from that discourse, which another will turn to poison by stopping to cavil at the mere letter.

Another objection arises from the affinity which characters of this class have with a *world* which lies in wickedness. In this instance of their worldly attachments, their charity will readily cover a multitude of sins, and form excuses for serious breaches of both tables of the Law, in their worldly friends. They appear in their element while in the society of these friends, especially if wealthy and accomplished. If any person's ear is wounded with a profane expression from one of their rich or fashionable acquaintance, they are ready to whisper that, "notwithstanding his unguarded language, he has yet upon the whole one of the best of hearts." Yet an infallible monitor has said, *Know you not—that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*

If the old maxim does not always hold good, that "a man is known by the company he keeps," it will infallibly stand good if we add one word to it, namely, that "a man is known by the company he *chooses* to keep." The physician may be detained in an infectious chamber, and the lawyer be found conversing with his client in a shower of rain—but nobody will infer from thence, that the one chooses to breathe foul air, or that the other chooses to be drenched. While the true

Christian, therefore, will avoid crudeness, fanaticism, or becoming the dupe of any religious party, he will also join the Psalmist in declaring, I am a companion of all those who fear you, and of those who keep your precepts.

Again, these moral and religious characters, whom I am laboring to convince of their errors, have been observed to be more disposed to nurse, than to examine, their *prejudices* against a minister of Mr. Newton's principles. "His teaching," say they, "tends to divide a parish or a family." But why do they not examine the reason? Why do they not consider, that introducing good—has ever been the occasion of disturbing evil? I recollect a great family, whose servants were in a ferment, because one truly conscientious man was found among them. "He will spoil the place!" was their remark, because he would not connive at their iniquity. But let me ask, what was to be blamed in this affair? his integrity, or their corruption? The master understood the case, and valued his servant in proportion as he marked the division.

And thus it is in religion, while moving in a blind and corrupt world. Christ, though the Prince of Peace, expressly declared that his doctrine would be the occasion of much division in the world; that he came not to send peace—but a sword; that he should be the occasion of family variance, etc. (Mat. 43 10:34, Mat. 43 10:35); and warns his disciples of what they must expect, while they endeavored faithfully to conduct his interests. Plain matter of fact declares, that, to maintain truth, has been the occasion of the suffering state of the true church in all ages, and that often unto the death of its innumerable martyrs. But, should a man who reads his Bible, or has any regard for the interests of truth, need to have this explained?

Another mistake might be exposed, in the stale objection, that such principles as Mr. Newton's tend to injure the interests of morality, from his strictly adhering to the doctrine of our Eleventh Article, on Justification by Faith. I would hope that this objection arises, in many, from a very slight acquaintance with the subject. It requires, indeed—but little attention to mark how expressly the Scriptures maintain our justification on the sole merit of our Redeemer, while they as fully maintain the necessity of our sanctification or holiness by his Spirit. It has been repeatedly proved, by sound and incontestable arguments, that these two grand fundamentals of our religion are so far from opposing each other, either in Scripture or in experience, that, when real, they are found inseparable. But, because this is not the place to either state or defend this doctrine at large, it may help such as have hitherto stumbled respecting it, to observe an illustration and proof of this position, in the matter of fact just now presented to their view.

To one willing to learn, I would say, *What proof would you require of the practical tendency of principles like Mr. Newton's?* We bring you, in his history, a most deplorable instance of human depravity and moral disorder. What experiment should be tried to recover this wretched creature to God and to himself? Regard, I say, the fact in this man's history. You will find that his recovery was not brought about by such considerations as are urged in what are termed *moral* or *rational* discourses—but, on the contrary, by such truths as he labored throughout his ministry to establish, not only from the Scriptures—but from his own experience of their efficacy. He dwelt on truths which are essential and peculiar to Christianity; such as the guilt and utter depravity of our fallen nature, whereby man is become an alien and apostate from his God; his inability to recover himself without the grace of the Holy Spirit; the necessity of regeneration by the same Spirit; and of faith in the Redeemer, not

only as the alone ground of his justification before God—but as the root and motive of all acceptable obedience and good works. "If I wanted a man to fly," said Mr. Newton, "I must contrive to find him wings. Likewise, if I would successfully enforce moral duties, I must advance evangelical motives." He preached truths like these constantly and fervently; and he lived a consistent example of them.

Thus, in all things approving himself a true disciple and minister of Christ, those, who knew him, know that, without making any odious comparison, it might be literally affirmed of Mr. Newton, that "by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left—his mouth was opened and his heart enlarged towards men."

I trust it is from a pure motive, that I am endeavoring to convince people of the class which I am addressing of their mistake. And I am the more induced to bring a case in point before them, because I think it cannot be paralleled, as an instance of the power of true religion, among those who labor to keep up prejudices against ministers of Mr. Newton's character; or who, by unfair or partial statements, strive to subvert the doctrines which he preached, and the great end to which all his labors were directed; namely, *the life of God in the soul of man*.

If indeed anyone is willing to be deceived, let him be deceived. At least such a one will not be addressed here. But, if a man has any serious sense of the value of his soul, of its lost condition by sin, and of the necessity of recovering the friendship of his God; if he feels the express declaration in the Scriptures, of an eternity of happiness or misery, to be of infinite importance, and one to which the weightiest concern in this perishing world is but as the dust on the balance—let

such a one consider these things. Let him inquire whether those, who object to the character and views of such a minister as Mr. Newton, labor first to probe the state of their own hearts deeply, as he did. When he was no longer an infidel, had renounced his grosser habits, and was to all appearance a new man; "Yet," says he, "though I cannot doubt that this change, so far as it prevailed, was wrought by the Spirit and power of God, still I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my more enormous sins—but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of the spirituality and extent of the Law of God. The hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ, and a continual dependence upon him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength, and comfort, was a mystery of which I had as yet no knowledge. I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past—but depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come."

Let the honest inquirer also consider, whether the objectors just spoken of are observed to be as anxious as Mr. Newton was, in their endeavors to serve God and propagate his will, to glorify his Son, and to save the souls of men; whether they have experienced the force of truth, in the conversion of their own hearts and lives. Conformed to the world, as he once was, have they been since transformed by the renewing of their minds, as he at length became? A few such questions as these, well considered, would lend to important discoveries. Such an inquiry would show, that, however some people may be able to treat of the outworks of Revelation, as they may of any other science which they have studied; yet, for such to dogmatize on religion, as it consists in a vital, spiritual, and experimental principle, would be as absurd as for a man originally deprived of one of the five senses to deny the perceptions of those who possess them all. In short, it is as ridiculous as it is profane, for men rashly to assert on

religious points, who evidently appear to have nothing so little at heart as the real influence and actual interests of religion.

Lastly, let nominal Christians seriously consider whether our immortal interests are not much too important to be staked upon a mere prejudice of education—an old, unrevised habit of thinking—a taking for granted that they are right, when the event may awfully prove the reverse; and that too, when such errors can never be rectified. The people with whom I have been pleading would pity the Jew or the Pagan in such an error; I earnestly pray that they may be enabled to see as clearly their own mistake, and not resent the admonition of a real friend now seeking to prevent it.

III. Do not make your profession of religion a receipt for all other obligations.

But there yet remains a class of people, found in the religions world, who entertain a high regard for Mr. Newton's character, and who should gather that instruction from it of which they appear to stand in great need. "They should all take care," as he expresses it, "that they do not make their profession of religion a receipt in full for all other obligations." I do not regard this class as hypocrites, so much as self-deceivers. They have a zeal for the Gospel—but without a comprehensive view of its nature. They do not consider, that, in avoiding error on the one hand—they are plunging into a contrary mistake. Like a child crossing a bridge, they tremblingly avoid the deep water which they perceive roaring on one side; and recede from it, until they are ready to perish from not perceiving the danger of that which lies on the other side.

The people, of whom I am here speaking, are defective in the grand article of A HUMBLE AND CONTRITE SPIRIT. I remember Mr.

Newton used to remark, that, "if any one criterion could be given of a real work of grace begun in the heart of a sinner, it would be found in his contrite spirit." Nothing is more insisted on in Scripture, as essential to real religion. I never knew any truly serious Christian, who would not readily join in acknowledging that "the religion of a sinner," as Mr. Newton expresses it, "stands on two pillars; namely, what Christ did *for* us in his flesh, and what he performs *in* us by his Spirit. Most errors," he adds, "arise from an attempt to separate these two." But the enemy still comes and sows tares among the wheat; a sort of loose profession has obtained, which has brought much reproach on religion; and has become a cause of stumbling to many, who perceive a class of Christians contending for only a part of Christianity.

You can prevail little with a professor of this description, in exhorting him by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, to self-denying, patient, or forbearing habits. If you state the genius of Christ's religion as it relates to the returning good for evil—in blessing those who curse, and praying for such as revile and persecute—in showing, out of a holy life, their works with meekness of wisdom—or in having a fervent charity towards all men, etc., he is ready to take fire; and to cover his conduct by maintaining a crude system of *mere doctrinal points*, which he understood.

Nothing, however, could be more opposed to the spirit and character of our departed friend, than the temper that has just been described. His zeal in propagating the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, was not more conspicuous, than the tenderness of his spirit as to the manner of his maintaining and delivering it. He was found constantly speaking the truth in love; and in meekness instructing those who oppose—if God perhaps would give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. There was a

gentleness, a candor, and a forbearance in him, that I do not recollect to have seen in an equal degree among his brethren; and which had so conciliating an effect, that even the enemies of truth often spoke loudly in praise of his character. On the other hand, this generated such an affection in his friends, that, had he attempted to preach longer than he did, a great part of his congregation would have assembled, were it only for the pleasure they had in seeing his person.

As I referred the Christians who were last addressed to the character of Mr. Newton as an example, so I never knew a more perfect one to my purpose. When any person depreciated the ministry of a good man, who, by advancing important truths, was opposing the reigning errors of the times—but who, from timidity or prejudice, was shy of Mr. Newton, he would imitate his Divine Master, by saying, "Let him alone; he who is not against us is on our side. Make no man an offender for a word. He is doing good, according to his views. Let us pray for him, and by no means weaken his hands. Who knows but God may one day put him far above our heads, both in knowledge and usefulness?"

His grand point, in a few words, as he used to express it, was, "**to break a hard heart—and to heal a broken heart.**" To implant the life of God in the soul of man, he would sacrifice every subordinate consideration; he felt every other to be comparatively insignificant. He saw the spirit of ancient Pharisaism working among those who cry the most against it—who exact to a scruple, in the tithe of mint, anise, and cumin of their own peculiarities, while they pass over the weightier matters of unity and love—straining at the *gnat of a private opinion*, and *swallowing the camel of a deadly discord*. On the contrary, so far as order and circumstances would admit, Mr. Newton received every godly man, and endeavored to strengthen his

hands, in whatever denomination of Christians he was found. His character well illustrated the Scripture, that though scarcely for a righteous (or just) man would one be—yet for a good man (that is one eminent for his candor and benevolence) some would even dare to die. However they *admired* some ministers, they all *loved* him; and saw exemplified in him that wisdom which is from above—which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

I conclude these Memoirs with a word to such as are endeavoring to follow the steps of their late faithful friend as he followed Christ.

We cannot but lament the errors just described. We, cannot, if we have any zeal for the Gospel—but protest against them. But let us recollect that they are not the only errors which are found in the church; and therefore let us watch lest any other root of bitterness spring up to trouble us, and defile many. When you lament with me the removal of ministers like Mr. Newton, let us recollect that ETERNAL FRIEND, who will never leave his church without witnesses to the truth; and who, among other reasons for removing earthly helps, teaches us thereby to rest only on that help which cannot be removed. Let us take comfort too in recollecting, that, spotted as the church may appear from the inconsistencies of many of its members—yet all the real good in this corrupt world is to be found in that church. God saw seven thousand true believers in Israel, while his prophet could see but one. Where some Jehu is sounding a trumpet before him, many are quietly passing to heaven without any such clamor. As a great writer remarks, "Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their persistent chink—while thousands of great cattle chew the cud and are silent—pray do not imagine that those that make the noise are 'the only inhabitants of the field.'"

But I must remark, that nothing has been more profitable to myself, in considering Mr. Newton's life, than the exhibition which it makes of a **Particular Providence**. If the church is not conducted by such visible signs now, as formerly, it is found to be as actually conducted. We read of a Divine hand concerned in the fall of sparrows, in numbering the hairs of our head, and in raising our dust to life—but with what little interest we read this, appears by our distrust in the first trial we meet. If we do not dare to join the sentiments of some, who regard such expressions as purely figurative and hyperbolically; yet our imagination is so overwhelmed with the difficulty of the performance, that we are apt to turn from the subject, with some general hope—but with a very indistinct and vague idea of a God at hand, faithful to his promise, and almighty to deliver. Yet, how many cases occur in the history of everyone of us, where nothing short of an Almighty Arm could prove a present help in the time of trouble!

Now this short history before us is admirably calculated to encourage our faith and hope, when we are called to pass through those deep waters that seem to bid defiance to human strength and contrivance. What, for instance—but a Divine interference caused Mr. Newton to be roused from sleep on board the Harwich at the moment of exchanging men, and thereby effected his removal? What placed him in a situation so remarkably suited to his recovering the ship which had already passed the place of his station in Africa, and brought him back to his country? What kept him from returning in the boat that was lost at Rio Castors? or from putting off to the ship that was blown up near Liverpool? Not to mention many other of his *special deliverances*.

"I am a wonder unto many," says he, in the motto of his Narrative; and, if we as distinctly considered the strange methods of mercy which have occurred in our own cases, we would at least be a wonder

to ourselves. But my aim is to point out the use which we should make of these Memoirs in this respect. We should, as Christians, mark the error of *disappointment* and *despair*. We should see that the case of a praying man cannot be desperate—that if a man is out of the pit of hell—he is on the ground of mercy. We should recollect that God sees a way of escape when we see none—that nothing is too hard for him—that he warrants our dependence, and invites us to call on him in the day of trouble, and gives a promise of deliverance. We should, therefore, in every trial, adopt the language of Mr. Newton's favorite poet, HERBERT

"Away, Despair! my gracious Lord does hear:
Though winds and waves assault my keel,
He does preserve it; he does steer,
Even when the boat seems most to reel:
Storms are the triumph of his art:
Well may he close his eyes—but not his heart."

From these facts we should see that Christ is able not only to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him—but that he is able to bring the most hardened blasphemer and abject slave from his chains of sin and misery, to stand in the most honorable and useful station, and proclaim to the wretched and to the ruined the exceeding riches of his grace. I have observed from my own experience, as well as from that of others, how strong a hold Satan builds by *despair*. The pressing fascinations of the *world*, the secret invitations of *sensuality*, and the distant prospect of eternal things, form a powerful current against vital religion. The heart of a Christian is ready to sink whenever these proud waters rise. Let him, therefore, recollect, that his hope, his only hope, is in pressing right onward through a world of lies and vanity—that his present dispensation is the walk of *faith*, and not of *sight*—and that by two

immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, he has given strong consolation to such as flee for refuge to the hope set before them.

One could, indeed, scarcely conjecture that cases like Mr. Newton's should be so perverted by any of our children, as that they should take confidence in their sins from his former course of life—but, because such facts, as I am credibly informed, do exist, let us be upon the watch to counteract this deep device of the great enemy.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS, who may have read these Memoirs merely, perhaps, for your amusement, consider with what a contrary design Paul states his former unrenewed condition. I was, says he, before, a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious—but for this cause I obtained mercy. For what cause? Was it that men should continue in sin because a miracle of special grace has been wrought? To do evil that good may come—is the black mark of a reprobate mind. But, for this cause, says the Apostle, I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who would hereafter believe in him to life everlasting.

The same caution is necessary whenever you may be tempted to hope for such a recovery as Mr. Newton's, after erring like him. To proceed upon such a hope is a gross presumption. Thousands perish in wrong courses—for every one who escapes from their natural consequences. Pray, therefore, that you may be enabled to resist the temptation of perverting such extraordinary cases. God affords them to be a savor of life unto life, while Satan would employ them to be a savor of death unto death. One, Almighty to save, affords you here, indeed, an instance of *special mercy*, which gives you the strongest encouragement in setting your faces towards his kingdom; and this is the proper use to be made of such a case.

Your parents, your most unselfish friends, are anxiously watching for your good; and they, perhaps, have put this book into your hand with a view of promoting it. The author has cause to thank God, who put it into the heart of his pious parent to make a similar attempt, and bless it with success; and he could tell of more such instances. May it please God that you may be added to the number!

Worldly prosperity would rather hurt, than help you, before your minds become rightly directed. Mr. Newton shows us that his firmest friend could not have served him, had not God first prepared his mind for the advancement. An enemy would occupy your minds with *perishing objects*—but God calls you to cultivate nobler feelings. He proposes glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life, by the Gospel. Seek, therefore, first the kingdom of god and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you!

A Plan of Pastoral Training

by John Newton

March 1, 1784

Dear sir,

I am not the son of a prophet, nor was I bred up among the prophets. I am quite a stranger to what passes within the walls of colleges and academies. I was as one born out of due time, and led, under the secret guidance of the Lord, by very unusual steps, to preach the faith which I once labored to destroy. Since you know all this, how could you think of applying to me for the plan of an academic institution? Yet, I confess, the design you mentioned to me, in which some of

your friends have thoughts of engaging, is so important in my view, that I am willing to come as near to your wishes as I can. I must not pretend to dictate a plan for the business which is now in contemplation. But, if you will allow me to indulge a sort of reverie, and suppose myself a person of some consequence in Utopia, where I could have the modeling of everything to my own mind; and that I was about to form an academy there, for the sole purpose of educating young men for the ministry of the Gospel—in this way I am willing to offer you my thoughts upon the subject with great simplicity and freedom. And, if any of the regulations of *my imaginary academy* should be judged applicable to your design, you and your friends will be heartily welcome to them.

I should then, in the first place lay down two or three important MAXIMS which I would hope never to lose sight of in the conduct of the affair; excepting that, if I should begin without them, I must stumble at the very threshold; and that, whenever I should neglect them afterwards, all my care, and labor, and expense, would be from that time thrown away.

My first maxim is, **That none but He who made the world—can make a minister of the Gospel.** If a young man has capacity—then culture and application may make him a scholar, a philosopher, or an orator; but a true minister must have certain principles, motives, feelings, and aims, which no industry or endeavors of men can either acquire or communicate. They must be given from above, or they cannot be received.

I adopt, as a second maxim, **That the Holy Scriptures are, both comprehensively and exclusively, the grand treasury of all that knowledge which is requisite and sufficient to make the minister the man of God, thoroughly furnished for**

every branch of his office. If, indeed, no other studies were of subordinate importance, in order to a right understanding of the Scriptures, and especially to those who are not only to know for themselves—but are appointed to teach others also; then academic instruction would be needless, and I might supply my young men with everything at once, by putting the Bible into their hands, and directing them to read it continually with attention and prayer. But my meaning is, that though there is such a connection in knowledge, that every branch of science may, by a judicious application, be rendered subservient to a minister's great design; yet no attainments in philology, philosophy, or in any or all the particulars which constitute the aggregate of what we call *learning*, can, in the least, contribute to make a minister of the Gospel, any farther than he is taught of God to refer them to, and to regulate them by, the Scripture as a standard. On the contrary, the more a man is furnished with this kind of apparatus, unless the leading truths of Scripture reign and flourish in his heart, he will be but the more qualified to perplex himself, and to mislead his hearers!

My third maxim is an inference from the two former. **That the true gospel minister who possesses these secondary advantages, though he may know the same things, and acquire his knowledge by the like methods as other scholars do, yet he must know and possess them in a manner peculiar to himself.** His criticisms, if he is a critic, will discover something which the greatest skill in grammatical niceties cannot of itself reach. If he is an orator, he will not speak in the artificial self-applauding language of man's wisdom—but in simplicity and with authority, like one who feels the ground he stands upon, and knows to whom he belongs, and whom he serves. If he mentions a passage of history, it will not be to show off his knowledge—but to illustrate or prove his point; and it will be evident, from his manner of speaking, that,

though he may have taken the facts from human writings, his knowledge of the springs of human action, and of the superintendency of a Divine Providence, is derived from the Word of God. And so of other instances.

In a word, if a young man was to consult me how he might be wise and learned in the usual sense of the words, I might advise him to repair to Oxford or Cambridge, or to twenty other places which I could name. But, if I thought him really desirous of becoming wise to win souls, I would invite him to my *New College in Utopia*.

From these *general observations*, I proceed more directly to my subject. You are then to suppose that I have taken my determination and counted the cost, and am now sitting down to contrive my plan. As a little attention to method may not be amiss, I shall endeavor to range my thoughts under four principal heads, concerning,

1. The Place.
2. The Tutor.
3. The Choice of Pupils.
4. The Course of Education.

1. The Place. If the metropolis of Utopia should be anything like ours, there are obvious reasons to forbid my fixing upon a spot very near it. I think not nearer than a moderate day's journey. Nor would I wish it much farther distant. Occasional visits to a great city, where there are many considerable ministers and Christians, should not be rendered impracticable; as they might furnish my young men with opportunities of forming connections, and making observations, that might contribute to their usefulness in future life. I would not only

fear lest they should be contaminated by the vices which too generally prevail where men live in a throng: if they escaped these, I would still have apprehensions, lest the notice that might be taken of them, and the respect shown them by well meaning friends, should imperceptibly seduce them into a spirit of self-importance, give them a turn for dress and company, and spoil that simplicity and dependence, without which I could have little hope of their success. I would wish it may be their grand aim to please the Lord, and under him, and for his sake, to please their tutor. They have, as yet, no business with other people. As for their tutor, they must love, reverence, and obey, and accurately watch his looks and every intimation of his will. But the difference between a rural and a town situation is so striking at first view, that I suppose it quite needless to say more upon this head. I therefore proceed,

2. To the choice of my tutor. Whoever he may be, when I have found him, and fixed him, I will take the liberty to tell him, that he is called to the most honorable and important office that man, in the present state of things, is capable of. The skillful and faithful tutor is not only useful to his pupils, considered as individuals—but he is remotely the instrument of all the blessings and benefits which the Lord is pleased to communicate by their ministry, in the course of their stated and occasional labors, to the end of life. On the other hand, the errors and prejudices of an incompetent tutor, adopted and perpetuated by his disciples, may produce a long progression of evil consequences, which may continue to operate and multiply when he and they are dead and forgotten. For, if the streams which are to spread far and wide throughout a land, are poisoned in the very source, who can foresee how far the mischief may be diffused. Unless, therefore, I can procure a proper tutor, I must give up my design. *It is better the youth should remain untaught—than that they should be taught to do wrong.*

And I seem not easily satisfied on this head. My idea of the person to whom I could cheerfully in trust the care of my academy, is not of an ordinary size.

However, since we are upon Utopian ground, where we may imagine as largely as we please, I will attempt to delineate him. And, were I to recommend a tutor to your friends, it should be the man who I thought came the nearest to the character I am about to describe.

For his first essential, indispensable qualification—I require **a mind deeply penetrated with a sense of the grace, glory, and efficacy of the Gospel.** However learned and able in other respects, he shall not have a single pupil from me, unless I have reason to believe that his heart is attached to the person of the Redeemer, as God-man; that, as a sinner, his whole dependence is upon the Redeemer's work of love, his obedience unto death, his intercession and mediatorial fullness. His sentiments must be clear and explicit respecting the depravity of human nature, and the necessity and reality of the agency of the Holy Spirit—to quicken, enlighten, sanctify, and seal those who, under his influence, are led to Jesus for salvation.

With respect to the different schemes or systems of divinity which obtain among those who are united in the acknowledgment of the above fundamental truths, I would look for my tutor among those who are called *Calvinists*; but he must not be of a curious, metaphysical, disputatious turn, a mere system-monger, or party-zealot. I seek for one who, having been himself taught the deep things of God by the Holy Spirit, in a gradual experimental manner; while he is charmed with the beautiful harmony and divinity of all the doctrines of grace, is at the same time aware of the mysterious

depths of the divine counsels, and the impossibility of their being fully comprehended by our feeble understandings.

Such a man will be patient and temperate in explaining the peculiarities of the Gospel to his pupils, and will wisely adapt himself to their several states, attainments, and capacities. After the example of the Great Teacher, he will consider what they can bear, and aim to lead them forward step by step, in such a manner, that the sentiments he instills into them may be their own, and not taken up merely upon his authority. He will propose the Scripture to them as a consistent whole; and guard them against the extremes into which controversial writers have forced themselves and each other, in support of a favorite hypothesis, so as, under a pretense of honoring some parts of the Word of God, to overlook, if not to contradict, what is taught with equal clearness in other parts.

I wish my pupils to be well versed in useful learning, and therefore my tutor must be a *learned* man. He must not only be able to teach them whatever is needful for them to learn—but should be possessed of such a fund, as that the most forward and most promising among them may feel he has a decided superiority over them in every branch of their studies. Besides an accurate skill in the *school classics*, he should be well acquainted with books at large, and possessed of a general knowledge of the state of literature and religion, and the memorable events of history in the successive ages of mankind. Particularly, he should be well versed in church history; for, though it is true, that the bulk of it is little worth knowing, for its own sake, yet a man of genius and wisdom will draw from the whole mass—a variety of observations suited to assist young minds in forming a right judgment of human nature, of true religion, of its counterfeits, and of the abuses to which the name of religion is capable of being perverted. And he will likewise be able to select for

their use, such authors and subjects as deserve their notice, from the surrounding rubbish in which they are almost buried.

My tutor should likewise be competently acquainted with the lighter accomplishments, which are usually understood by the term *Belles Lettres*; and a proper judge of them with respect both to their intrinsic and relative value. Their *intrinsic* value (to creatures who are posting to eternity) is not great; and a wise man, if he has not been tinctured with them in early life, will seldom think it worth his while to attend much to them afterwards. Yet in such an *age* as ours, it is some disadvantage to a man in public life, if he is quite a stranger to them. To a tutor they are in a manner necessary.

It is farther desirable that he should have a lively imagination, under the direction of a sound judgment, and a correct and cultivated taste. Otherwise, how can he assist and form the taste and judgment of his pupils, or direct or criticize their compositions?

Natural science is not only a noble study—but one which offers the most interesting and profitable relaxations from the weight of severer studies. If the tutor is not possessed of this, he will lose a thousand opportunities of pointing out to his pupils the signatures of wisdom, power, and goodness, which the wonder-working God has impressed upon every part of the visible creation. But, at the same time, he should know where to stop, and what bounds to set to their inquiries. It is not necessary that either he or they should be numbered among the first astronomers or virtuosi of the age. A life devoted to the service of God and souls, will not afford leisure for this *diminutive preeminence*. A *general* knowledge will suffice, even in the tutor. And, while he lectures upon these subjects, he will caution them against spending too much time and thought upon those branches of philosophy which have but a very remote tendency to

qualify them for preaching the Gospel. They are sent into the world, and into the academy, not to collect shells, and fossils, and butterflies, or to surprise each other with feats of electricity—but to win souls for Christ!

Perhaps I have said enough of my tutor's knowledge; and may now consider him with regard to his SPIRIT, his methods of communicating what he knows to his pupils, and his manner of living with them as a father with his children.

He must be *apt to teach*. A man may know much, yet not have a facility of imparting his ideas. *Ability to teach* is a talent and a gift of God, and therefore will always be found, in some good degree, in the person who is called of God to the tutor's office.

He will consider himself as a teacher, not only in the lecture-room—but in all places, and at all times, whether sitting in the house, or walking by the way, if any of his pupils are with him. And he will love to have them always about him, so far as their studies and his own necessary avocations will admit.

Two things he will aim to secure from them—reverence and affection. Without maintaining a *steady authority* he can do nothing. Likewise, unless they love him, everything will go on heavily. But, if the pupils are properly chosen, such a man as I have described will be both *loved* and *feared*. His spiritual and exemplary deportment, his wisdom and abilities—will command their respect. His condescension and gentleness, his tenderness for their personal concerns, his assiduity in promoting their comfort, and doing them every friendly service in his power—will engage their love. These happy effects will be farther promoted by their frequent mutual fellowship in prayer, by his expository lectures, and by his public ministry, if he is a preacher. Having his eye unto the Lord, and his

heart in his work, a blessing from on high shall descend upon him and upon his house.

As human nature is the same in all places, it is probable that the Christians in our Utopia may be divided among themselves with respect to rituals and modes of worship, in some such manner as we see and feel among us. Now here, as in everything else, I would have my tutor to be a man of a generous enlarged spirit, a real friend of that liberty with which Jesus has made his people free from the shackles and impositions of men; one who uniformly judges and acts upon that grand principle of the New Testament, which is likewise a plain and obvious maxim of common sense; I mean, that Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, is the sole Lord and Judge of conscience.

I suppose my tutor has already taken his side; that he is either in the *establishment*, (if there is one in Utopia,) or, of course, a *dissenter* from it. And really, as to my scheme, I am indifferent which side he has taken; we shall not have a minute's debate about it, provided he acts consistently with the principles which I have assigned him. But, as I myself, living in England, am of the Established Church, that you may not suspect me of partiality, I will suppose, and am ready to take it for granted, that he will be found to be an Utopian Dissenter.

On this supposition my imagination takes a flight, hastens into the midst of things, and anticipates as present what is yet future. Methinks I see the tutor indulging his scholars (as at proper seasons he often will) with an hour of free conversation; and from some question proposed to him concerning the comparative excellence or authority of different forms of church government, taking occasion to open his mind to them, something in the following manner.

"My dear friends, you may have observed, that when, in the course of our lectures, I have been led to touch upon this subject, it has not been my custom to speak in a dogmatic style. I have sometimes intimated to you, that, though every part of the *Levitical* worship was of positive divine institution, yet, when the people rested and trusted in their external forms, the Lord speaks as abhorring his own appointments. I have told you, upon the apostle's authority, that the kingdom of God consists not in foods and drinks, in names and forms—but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

"Amidst the many divisions and subdivisions which are in the visible church, there are, in reality—but two sorts of people, the children of God, and the children of the world. The former sort, though partakers in one life and in one hope, yet living in successive ages, in various countries, under very different modes of government, education, and customs—it seems morally impossible that they should all agree, as by instinct, in one certain mode of church worship. It is indeed said, that there is a plan prescribed in the *New Testament*, to which all ought to conform as nearly as possible. All parties say this in favor of their *own* plans; and men, eminent for wisdom and holiness, are to be found among the advocates for each. But is it not strange, that, if the Lord has appointed such a standard, the wisest and holiest of his people should differ so widely in their views of it, and deviate so far from each other when they attempt to reduce it to practice?

"Let others dispute; but, as for you, my friends, and I, let us rather adore the wisdom and goodness of our Lord. He who knew the heart of man, the almost invincible power of early prejudices, and what innumerable circumstances in different periods and places, would render it impracticable for his people to tread exactly in the same line, has provided accordingly. The rules and lights he has afforded

us respecting the outward administration of his church, are recorded with such a latitude, that his true worshipers may conscientiously hope they are acceptable to him, though the plans which they believe to be consistent with his revealed will, are far from corresponding with each other. It is sufficient that the apostolical canons, 'Let all things be done decently and in order,' 'to edification and in love,' are universally binding; and, were these on all sides attended to, smaller differences would be very supportable.

"I have often pointed out to you the wonderful analogy which the Lord has established in many instances, between his works in the outward *creation*, and in his kingdom of *grace*. Perhaps the variety observable in the former, may be one instance of this kind. When you see every vegetable arrayed in green, exactly of the same shade, or all tulips variegated in the same manner, as if painted from one common pattern, then, and not before, expect to find true believers agreed in their views and practice respecting the modes of religion.

"Study therefore the Scriptures, my friends, with humble prayer, that the Lord may give you such views of these concerns as may fit you for the stations and services to which his providence may lead you. See with your own eyes, and judge for yourselves. This is your right. One is your Master, even Christ; and you need not, you ought not, to call any man master upon earth. But be content with this. Do not arrogate to yourselves the power of judging for others. Be willing that they should see with their own eyes likewise. The Papists, upon the ground of the assumed infallibility of their church, are, at least, consistent with themselves in condemning all who differ from them. Protestants confess themselves fallible, yet speak the same peremptory language.

"As to myself, if I had thought it preferable, upon the whole, to be a minister in our established church, I might probably have been one; but, I trust, I am where the Lord would have me be, and I am satisfied. *My desire for you is to see you able ministers of the New Testament.* As to the part of the vineyard in which you are to labor, wait simply upon the Lord, and he in his good time will point it out to you. If Scripture and conscience lead you to prefer the dissenting line, I shall say, it is well, provided you embrace it with a liberal spirit, and have a better warrant for your choice, than merely the example of your tutor. Should you determine otherwise, I shall still say, it is well, provided I see you unselfish, humble, and faithful. Your being educated under my roof is a circumstance not likely to facilitate your admission into the established church; but if the Lord, in his providence, should open to any of you a door on that side, and incline you to enter, I shall not dissuade you from it, as though I thought it were sinful. I shall only wish you to attend to that advice which cannot mislead you, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your path.'"

Thus far my tutor.—Or, since I am in a supposing humor, if you will give me leave to make one supposition more, that it is possible there may be Methodists and Itinerants in Utopia, as we have in England; he would then, perhaps, continue his discourse a little longer, as follows:

"Though the pastoral care of a single congregation is the service which the Lord has allotted me, and I have not seen it my duty to engage in anything which might lead me long or far from the people to whom I serve, I am no enemy to itinerant preaching. My Lord and Savior himself, his apostles and first servants, were all itinerants; and I believe that houses and ships, hills and plains, the side of a

river or the sea-shore, are all fit places for preaching the Gospel, and sufficiently authorized as such by the highest precedents. I cannot therefore censure, much less condemn, a practice which the Scripture warrants, and to which, I doubt not, the Lord has given abundant testimony in our own times, by making the Word thus dispensed effectual to the conversion and consolation of many souls.

"I believe, indeed, that some people, not duly acquainted with their own hearts, nor with what is requisite to constitute a preacher, have too hastily supposed themselves called to preach the Gospel, when the event has proved that the Lord has neither called them to his service, nor furnished them for it. And I think, if it should generally be allowed that young men are proper judges in their own cause, and have a right to commence to be preachers, when, or where, or how they please, without the advice or approbation of ministers more experienced than themselves, many inconveniences may and must follow. I could wish every young man to be so impressed with the force of the apostle's question, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' that he should rather need invitation and encouragement to preach, 'than be disposed to run hastily into the work, as the horse rushes into the battle.'

But I must not expect everything to be managed according to my wish. I have mourned over the miscarriages of some itinerant preachers; but I have been much comforted by the good conduct and success of others. It is neither my business nor my intention to persuade you to this course; but if, when you are properly instructed and qualified for the ministry, I should see any of you disposed to go forth in the itinerant way; should I be satisfied of your principles and motives, and have reason to hope your zeal was tempered with humility; I know not that I dared refuse my consent. For, as I have often told you, the honor of my Lord and Savior, and the welfare of

precious souls, are far dearer to me than the detached interests of any church party; and, if Christ be faithfully and successfully preached, in whatever way, and by whatever instruments, he is pleased to work, I do rejoice, yes, and will rejoice."

I think what I have said of the tutor, and what he has just now said for himself, may suffice to give you an idea of the person I would choose; and that it is now time to consider.

3. The choice of pupils. I would have them all *resident* with the tutor, and therefore their number can be but small; especially as I would wish him to undertake every branch of their education. He might have an assistant to teach the rudiments of the languages, a service that would otherwise take up much of the time which he could better employ; but he must do all the rest himself. I suppose therefore that ten, or at the most twelve, pupils will be a sufficient number to be under his care at once. The man I have described would not be *mercenary*—but the laborer is worthy of his reward. As I shall find him work enough to take up his whole time, his pay ought to be competent and liberal; and, as I have supposed myself rich enough to execute my plan in whatever manner I please, I hope I shall not starve my tutor, nor put his economical talents on the stretch, to contrive how to squeeze and save a pittance out of the sum allotted for their board. I would fix the boarding upon equitable and moderate terms, distinct from his salary, which should be handsome, and always the same, whether he had one pupil with him, or ten or twelve. It would be my part to keep the number up; but, if I neglect it, he would be no loser; nor ought he to be dependent upon my caprice or negligence; but he should stand upon an easy, settled footing, so as to be free, not only from poverty—but from anxious care, that he might be able to attend his business without distraction.

And now my house is ready, where shall I find young men to fill it? I must look around me, and request my friends to look out for me. When I have found two, I will send them, and the rest as they offer. Perhaps it would be one of the chief difficulties attending my scheme, to collect ten or twelve youths *worthy* of such a tutor.

They must be **serious**. I mean, they must have an awakened experimental sense of the truth and goodness of the Gospel. This is a point not easily ascertained, especially in young people. There is often a something that resembles it, which, upon trial, does not prove satisfactory. However, my part will be to look to the Lord for guidance, and then judge as well as I can. But I hope no persuasion or recommendation, no desire of pleasing or obliging a friend, would prevail on me to admit one who I did not truly believe was a subject of the grace of God. Who would undertake to teach a *parrot* algebra? Yet this would be as practicable as to make those able and faithful preachers, whom the Lord has not first made Christians!

They must likewise have **capacity**. It is not necessary that their abilities should be of the first-rate, (perhaps but few of such are called,) but some tolerable measure of natural abilities, capable of being opened and improved by education, seems almost necessary in the person who aims to be a minister of the Gospel. At least it will be necessary upon my plan; for, as my tutor cannot take many, I must give the preference to such as may both do him credit by their proficiency under his care, and be qualified to profit others when they leave him.

If the heart be changed and sanctified by grace—a person of the weakest natural understanding will acquire, under divine teaching, all that is necessary to enable him to fill up his station in private life with propriety, to overcome the world, and to make his own calling

and election sure. But a preacher must have **gifts** as well as **grace**, to be able to divide the Word of truth as a workman that needs not to be ashamed. And, therefore, though the Lord was once pleased by a dumb donkey to rebuke the foolishness of a prophet, I am not forward to acknowledge those as ambassadors sent by him, (however well-meaning they may be,) who seem either to have no *message* to deliver—or no *ability* to deliver it.

I would likewise be satisfied, as much as possible, concerning the views and **motives** which make them desirous of devoting themselves to the ministry. Some desires of this kind are very frequently found in young converts. When a sense of eternal things is new and lively upon their minds, and they look round upon a world lying in wickedness, they are much affected. The obligations they feel to the Redeemer, a grief that he should be so little known, so little loved, and a compassion for their fellow-sinners, whom they see liable to perish for lack of knowledge, make them often long to be employed, and sometimes constrain them to *run before they are sent*.

But, if they are not really designed by the Lord for this service, either their desires towards it gradually subside, and they yield themselves to his appointment in other paths of life. Or, if they unadvisedly venture upon it, they are seldom either comfortable or useful. They soon feel themselves unequal to the work; or, if self-conceit prevents *them* from feeling it, their *hearers* are very sensible of it. They often mistake errors for truth; they retail scraps and shreds of *sentiments which they pick up from others*, and for lack of judgment, misapply them. Thus hypocrites are encouraged, and those whom the Lord would have comforted, are made sad. They think that preaching with power consists in *vociferation* and novel views; and that to utter

everything that comes upon their minds, without any regard to text, context, occasion, or connection, is to preach extempore.

Too often Satan gains open advantage over them. They are puffed up with pride, taken in snares, and perhaps fall into such woeful miscarriages, as at length ruin their characters, and stop their mouths.

It is, therefore, of great importance to be workers together with the Lord in his business; to choose those whom he chooses, to bring forward those whom he is preparing, and, if possible, none but these. We cannot indeed know the heart—but we may be wary and circumspect in judging by such evidences as we can procure; and we ought to be so. Perhaps, after all, we may be mistaken in some instances; but, if we have done our best, we have done well, and shall not be blameable for such consequences as we could not possibly foresee or prevent. If a candidate for the academy appears to be of a sincere and humble spirit, to have some acquaintance with his own heart, a tolerable capacity, hard-working, and an unblamable character as to his personal conduct, I shall be disposed to admit him. But I would leave the final decision of his fitness to the tutor; for which purpose it may be proper that he should be under the tutor's eye, for a limited time, as a *probationer*.

4. The next point I am to consider is, the course of STUDIES they should pursue; though I am rather inclined to give this up, absolutely and without reserve, to the tutor, who, if he answers my description, must be the most proper person to institute a plan for himself, and would have no need of my assistance. But, if his humility and his good opinion of me should lead him to desire my advice, he should have it. I do not mean as to little secondary issues—but I would submit to him, in a general and miscellaneous way, such

hints as may occur to me upon the subject. And I submit them to you beforehand.

A few things may be previously noticed, which, though they do not properly belong to their academic studies, are well worthy of attention.

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus!" 2 Timothy 2:3. A minister is a *soldier* of Jesus Christ, and, as such, is to expect and endure hardship. It is well to have this in your eye in the education of young men. They are not called to be loafers—but soldiers; not to live delicately—but to prepare for hardship. They should therefore be advised and accustomed to prefer a *plain and frugal manner of life*, and to avoid multiplying those expenses which luxury and folly would prompt us to multiply almost infinitely. A propensity to indulgence either in the quantity or quality of food, is a baseness unworthy of a man, still more unsuitable to the character of a Christian, and scandalous in a minister! I am no advocate for a monkish austerity, or a scrupulous, superstitious self-denial, which will almost starve the body—to feed the pride of the heart. It is, however, very desirable to possess, in early life, a habit of temperance, a mastery over appetite, and a resolute guard against everything that has a tendency to blunt the activity of the mind and heart. And youth is the proper season for gaining this mastery, which, if the golden opportunity is then lost, is seldom thoroughly acquired afterwards.

A propriety in *dress* should also be consulted. Neatness is commendable; but a student in divinity should keep at a distance from being a devotee to *fashion*. A finical disposition in this article not only occasions a waste of time and expense—but is an evidence of

a trifling turn of mind, and exposes the fine self-admiring youth, to the contempt or pity of the wise and godly.

Farther, a habit of rising early should be resolutely formed. It redeems much time, and chiefly of those hours which are most favorable to study or devotion. It likewise cuts off the temptation to sitting up late, a hurtful and preposterous custom, which many students unwarily give into, and which they cannot so easily break, when the bad effects of it upon their health, convince them too late of their imprudence.

Let them be guarded against the snares attending a large acquaintance, and unnecessary visiting. The tutor will, doubtless, maintain authority and good discipline in his house, and not allow any of his pupils to be absent from family worship, nor abroad after a fixed hour, without his express permission, which should not be given but for solid and just reasons. And he cannot be too careful, both by advice and vigilance, to prevent them from forming any female connections while under his roof, however honorable the views, or deserving the person may be. Love and courtship are by no means favorable to study, nor indeed to devotion, at a time when their present engagements, and the uncertainty of their prospects in future life, render a settlement by marriage improper, if not impracticable.

Much study is weariness to the flesh; and the body and the mind are so nearly connected, that what affects the one, will have an influence upon the other. Relaxation and exercise are therefore necessary at proper seasons, for those who wish to preserve cheerfulness and strength for service, and not to become old and disabled, through lowness of spirits, infirmities, and pains, before old age actually overtakes them. Riding is a manly, unexceptionable exercise, where

it can be conveniently practiced. But *walking* is, I suppose, equally healthful, and requires neither expense nor preparation.

That the students may have an object in view when they go from home, the tutor will probably point out to them some of the Lord's poor, who live at convenient distances, whom they may visit, and comfort with their sympathy, advice, and prayers, as well as administer to the relief of their necessities, according to their ability. Thus, while they are consulting their own health, they may, at the same time, imitate Him, "who *went about* doing good." And in such visits they may meet with many hints from poor believers, concerning the Lord's wisdom and faithfulness in his dealings with them, and of the power of true religion—to confirm what they read upon these subjects, and probably some hints which their books will not supply them with. Farther, if when they are abroad together, they will attempt such conversation as warmed the hearts of the disciples when walking to Emmaus; and if, when alone, they adopt the pattern of Isaac, who went out into the field to meditate; then all the time they can thus employ may be set down to the account of their studies, for few of their hours can be more profitably improved.

But *what*, and *how*, are they to study? The answer to this question depends upon another. **What is the object of their studies?** It is to make them not merely *scholars*—but ministers thoroughly furnished for their office. The particulars I aim at in placing them with my tutor are such as follow:

1. An orderly, connected, and comprehensive knowledge of the common places and topics of divinity, considered as a whole; a system of truth, of which the holy Scripture is the sole fountain, treasury, and standard.

2. A competent acquaintance with sacred literature; by which I mean such writings, ancient and modern, as are helpful to explain or elucidate difficulties in Scripture, arising from phraseology, from allusion to customs and events not generally known, and from similar causes, and which therefore cannot be well understood without such assistance.

3. Such a general knowledge of philosophy, history, and other branches of literature, as may increase the stock of their ideas, afford them just conceptions of the state of things around them, furnish them with a fund for variety, enlargement, and illustration, that they may be able to enliven and diversify their discourses, which, without such a fund, will be soon apt to run in a *beaten track*, and to contain little more than a repetition of the same leading thoughts, without originality or spirit.

4. An ability to methodize, combine, distinguish, and distribute the ideas thus collected by study, so as readily to know what is properly adapted to the several subjects to be treated of, and to the several parts of the same subject. When the pupils are thus far accomplished, then I shall hope,

5. That they will in good time be able to preach extemporaneously. I do not mean without forethought or plan—but without lengthy notes, and without the excessive labor of committing their discourses to memory. This ability of speaking to an auditory in a pertinent and collected manner, with freedom and decorum, with fidelity and tenderness, looking at *them* instead of looking at a *paper*, gives a preacher a considerable advantage, and has a peculiar tendency to command and engage the attention. It likewise saves much time, which might be usefully employed in visiting his people. It is undoubtedly a gift of God—but, like many other gifts, to be sought

not only by *prayer*—but in the use of *means*. The first essays will ordinarily be weak and imperfect; but the facility increases, until at length a habit is formed by diligence and perseverance. I would not think my academy complete, unless my tutor was attentive to form his pupils to the character of *public speakers*.

General rules admit of exceptions. I have myself known people, who, with plain sense, true humility, and a spirit devoted to the Lord, and dependent upon him, have, with little or no assistance from men, proved solid, exemplary, and useful ministers. Such instances convince me, that, however expedient *learning* may be—it is not indispensably necessary for a minister, especially for one who is to labor in a retired situation, and among plain, uneducated hearers. I would not, therefore, preclude my tutor from all opportunity of being useful to people of this description, who would be glad of such helps from him as they might receive, when the time of life, or particular circumstances, might render the study of languages and science inconvenient.

And in general, as the capacities, dispositions, and prospects of a number of pupils would, of course, be different; I would leave it to his discretion to conduct them to the same grand ends of service, by such difference of method as he should judge most suitable to each; so as not to discourage or overburden the truly deserving, nor to permit (if it can be prevented) the more studious and successful, to set too high a value upon their superior accomplishments. For, after all, it must be owned, and ought to be remembered, that *grace* and *divine wisdom* are of unspeakably greater importance than *scholastic attainments* without them. We are sure, that, though a man had the knowledge of all mysteries, the gifts of tongues and miracles, and the powers of an angel—if he has not likewise humility, spirituality, and love, he is in the sight of God but as sounding brass

or a noisy cymbal. He may answer the purpose of a church bell, to call a congregation together—but has little prospect of doing them good when they are assembled.

But to return to my professed students:

I. As to the study of **theology**. How far it may be expedient to adopt some *system* or *body of divinity* as a ground whereon to proceed, I am not quite determined; and which of these learned summaries is the best, I shall not attempt to decide until I have read them all. My tutor will have more of this knowledge; I shall therefore refer the choice, if it is necessary to choose one, to him. Calvin, Turretin, Witsius, and Ridgeley, are those with which I have formerly been most acquainted. But indeed, of these, at present, I can remember little more than that I have read them, or the greatest part of them. I recollect just enough to say, that, though I approve and admire them all, I have at the same time my particular objections to them all, as to this use of them.

The Bible is my *body of divinity*; and, were I a tutor myself, I believe I would prefer the Epistles of Paul, as a summary, to any *human* systems I have seen, especially his Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, the Hebrews, and Timothy. There are few uninspired writings, however excellent in the main—but bear some marks of the infirmities, attachments, and biases, which, in a greater or less degree, are inseparable from the present state of human nature. I would have my pupils draw their knowledge as immediately from the *fountain-head* as possible. I care not how extensive and various their reading of good authors may be under their tutor's eye; the more so the better. He will improve the differences they will find among learned and spiritual men, into an argument to engage them to study the Scripture more closely, and to bring every debated sentiment to

be tried, and finally determined, by that unerring standard. He will teach them to collect the detached portions of truth wherever they meet with them; to borrow from all—but to give themselves up implicitly to the dictates of none. For I know no author who is worthy of the honor of being followed absolutely and without reserve.

I am told (for I know nothing of academies but from hearsay) that it is customary for pupils to write out their lectures. If I should adopt this custom, I would not confine myself to it. Such written lectures, if well executed, must be good patterns to form the students to closeness in method and style. But I would likewise wish the tutor to give them unpremeditated lectures. Great masters of music (it is said) frequently feel an impetus in extempore playing, which enables them to execute off the cuff, such strains as they wish to repeat—but cannot; their taste assuring them that they are superior in kind to what they can ordinarily attain when they study and compose by rule. Thus a tutor who thoroughly understands his subject, and speaks from the fullness of his heart, will, now and then, at least, feel a happy moment, when he will seem to possess new powers. His thoughts and expressions at such a time will have a peculiar precision and force, and will possibly illuminate and affect his hearers more than His regular and written lectures. When he is done speaking, let the pupils retire and commit to writing what they can recollect of such discourses, keeping to his method—but using their own expressions. These exercises would engage their attention, employ their invention and ingenuity, accustom them to consider the subjects in different lights, and contribute to make the knowledge they derive from him more their own, than by being always confined to transcribe, line by line, what was read to them.

I would not have the pupils put upon the needless and hurtful attempt of proving first principles. May not a man read lectures upon optics without previously proving the existence of the sun? My tutor will not coldly lay before his students the arguments pro and con, and then leave them to decide, as evidence to them appears, whether there is a God, or whether the Scripture is of divine inspiration or not. So likewise with respect to the different sentiments on the

primary points of Scripture, as whether the Savior is man or angel, or God manifest in the flesh; or concerning the different acceptations of the words, depravity, guilt, faith, grace, atonement, and the like; he will speak with a becoming confidence and certainty on which side the truth lies. He will, indeed, furnish them with solid confutations of error, from Scripture and experience; but he will take care to let them know that these things are already settled, and proposed to them, not as candidates for their good opinion—but as truths, which demand and deserve their attention.

My tutor will not *dogmatize*, and expect them to adopt his opinions without any better reason than because they are his. He will endeavor to throw every light he is master of, upon the subject; but, at the same time, he will speak as a teacher, not as an inquirer; as one who speaks that which he has known, and testifies that which he has seen. He will not attempt to fill their head with a detail of all the cavils which pride and sophistry have started against the truths of God; nor so far flatter his pupils, as to suppose them competent judges when they have weighed and compared the several argumentations. But he will rather warn them of their *natural bias to the erroneous side*, and guard them against the arts of those who, with fair words and fine speeches, beguile the unprincipled and unwary. A tutor is a guide, and, if worthy of his office, must be able to say, without hesitation, "This is the way—walk in it."

Should he be seduced, by the specious sounds of candor and freedom of inquiry, to take the opposite method, and think it his duty to puzzle his scholars with all the waking dreams, objections, and evasions, by which men, reputed wise, have opposed the simplicity of the faith once delivered to the saints; I fear that they would be more likely to turn out *skeptics*, than *ministers* of the Gospel.

Nor should he, with my consent, lay down a scheme of what is commonly called natural religion, as a foundation whereon to build a religion of divine revelation. It is needful that he should give his pupils a just idea of the religion of fallen nature; but he will remind them, that the few valuable sentiments occasionally found in the writings of the Heathen philosophers and moralists were not their own. They are all represented as having traveled for their knowledge, and all in the same route, into Phoenicia or Egypt, into the neighborhood of the only people, who, at that time, were favored with the oracles of God; and may therefore be justly supposed to have derived the detached particles of truth they acquired from that people, either by immediate converse with them, or from their inspired books, especially from the time they were translated into the Greek language. He will point out to them the strong probability that the later philosophers were equally, or more, indebted to the Christians and the New Testament.

With respect to the skeptical moralists and reasoners of modern times, the proof will be still clearer and stronger, that their *best notions* are borrowed from the religion they attempt to depreciate. My tutor, in order to satisfy them how far the powers of unassisted fallen nature can proceed in the investigation of religious and moral truths, will set before them the *progress* which has actually been made in this way by the Negroes in Africa, or the American Indians. With such a picture of natural religion in their view, I should hope they would be led most cordially to praise God for the inestimable gift of his Holy Word; without the help of which, the boasted *light of nature* is darkness that may be felt.

In my academy, I would have no formal disputations upon points of divinity. If it is necessary to sharpen or exercise their wits by disputing, (to which, under proper regulations, I would not object,)

there are topics in abundance at hand. Let them dispute, if they please, for or against the motion of the earth. Let them determine whether Caesar or Pompey was the better man; or, in what respects Cato, who chose to die rather than venture to look Caesar in the face, discovered more fortitude or true greatness of mind, than the slave who elopes from his master for fear of the lash. Let them contend whether learning has, upon the whole, been productive of most good, or of most mischief, to mankind. My tutor can supply them with a thousand questions of this kind. But, to set a young man to put his ingenuity to the stretch, either to maintain a gross error, or to oppose a known and important truth, is, in my view, not only dangerous—but little less than a species of *profaneness!* What must the holy angels, who, with humble admiration, contemplate the wisdom and glory of God displayed in the Gospel; what must they think of the arrogance of sinful worms, who presume so far to trifle with the doctrines and mysteries he has revealed, as to degrade them into subjects for school exercise and logical prize-fighting? Can it be possible to maintain a spirit of reverence and dependence on God, amidst the noise of such profane discussions? And, if the youth to whom the wrong side of the question is committed, should, by superior address, baffle and silence his antagonist, my heart would be in pain for him, lest he should, from that moment, be prejudiced against the truth which he had insulted with success, and think it really indefensible, because the other was not able to defend it.1

Having been so long on the first article, I must endeavor to be more brief on those which follow.

II. By **sacred literature**, I chiefly mean linguistics, criticism, and antiquities, so far as they are employed in the illustration of Scripture. In these studies, if there is a proper application in the pupils, little more will be needful on the tutor's part, than to put

suitable books into their hands, to superintend their progress, and to obviate difficulties they may meet with. I would wish them not only to read the Scriptures in the Hebrew and Greek originals—but to be tolerable masters of the construction in both languages. This attainment is certainly not necessary to a minister; but they who apply themselves to the study of divinity in early life, will have time enough to acquire it, and the acquisition will be well worth their labor. If not *necessary*, it will be found very *expedient* and *useful*, and, when the difficulties of the first entrance and rudiments are surmounted, will be very pleasant.

The mind is capable of too many acquisitions: life is short, and more important business awaits them, in subservience to which everything else must be conducted.

III. Much time cannot be allowed in our academy for the pursuit of **polite literature**. But an entrance may be made, and a relish for it acquired, under the direction and restraint of the tutor, which may provide the students with a profitable amusement for leisure hours in future life; for in this knowledge they may advance from year to year.

Other books will occasionally come in their way; for the tutor should have a well chosen library, for the accommodation of his pupils; but he will guard them against spending too much time, in this line of reading. For, though it has its subordinate advantages, it may, if too much indulged, divert them from the main point. And they should be *taught to refer everything they read to the principles of Scripture*, to the knowledge of the heart of man, and the works, the ways, the wisdom, and providence of God; otherwise reading will only tend to

make them wise in their own conceit. I make short work with this article, and hasten to consider,

IV. What may be helpful (by the divine blessing) to enable the pupils to communicate the fruits of their knowledge to advantage in the public ministry, that they may appear workmen that need not be ashamed. For this, as I have formerly intimated, their chief and immediate dependence must be on the Lord. He alone can give them a mouth and wisdom for his service; and, without the unction from on high, the study of divinity and everything relative to it, will be but like learning the art of navigation on shore, which is very different from the knowledge necessary to the mariner who is actually called to traverse the ocean. But *dependence upon the Lord* should be no discouragement to the *use of means*.

I would have my students good logicians. The logic of the schools is, in a great measure, a cramped, forced, and formal affair, and may possibly have made almost as many scholastics and sophists, as good reasoners. But Dr. Watts has furnished us with a system of logic in a more intelligible and amiable form, and divested it of the solemn impertinences with which it was encumbered.

As the rules of *grammar* are themselves drawn from the language they are designed to regulate, so good logic is no more than the result of observations upon the powers of the human mind: and thus we see, that many people of plain sense are passable logicians, though they never saw a book upon the subject, and, perhaps, do not understand the meaning of the term. But they may be much assisted in the habits of thinking, judging, and reasoning, and in disposing their thoughts in an advantageous method, by rules judiciously formed and arranged. In this view I judge Dr. Watts's Logic, with his subsequent treatise on the Improvement of the Mind, to be very

valuable. Unless a man can conceive and define his subject clearly, distinguish and enumerate the several parts, and know how to cast them into a convenient order and dependence, he cannot be a masterly preacher. And though a good understanding may supersede the necessity of logical rules, it will likewise derive advantage from them. It remains to inquire,

5. How the pupils are to be assisted and directed that they may be able to preach extempore: an ability which, I suppose, to be ordinarily attainable by all who are called of God to preach the Gospel, if they will diligently apply themselves to attain it, in the use of proper means. I do not expect they will succeed in this way to my wish, without prayer, study, effort, and practice. For, as I have already hinted, I mean something more by it than *speaking at random*.

A well known observation of Lord Bacon is much to my present purpose. It is to this effect: That *reading* makes a full man, *writing* an exact man, and *speaking* makes a ready man. The approved extempore preacher must have a fund of knowledge collected from various reading; and it would not be improper to read some books, with the immediate design of comparing his style and manner with approved models. It might be wished that the best divines were always the best writers; but the style of many of them is quaint, difficult, and obscure. Some books that are well written have little else to recommend them, yet may be useful for this purpose; and the periodical writings of Addison and Johnson abound with judicious observations on men and manners, besides being specimens of easy and elegant composition.

Among writers in divinity, I would recommend Dr. Watts and Dr. Witherspoon as good models. By perusing such authors with

attention, I hope the pupils will acquire a taste for good writing, and be judges of a good style. *Perspicuity, closeness, energy, and ease*, are the chief properties of such a style. On the contrary, a style that is either obscure, redundant, heavy, or affected, cannot be a good one. But I cannot advise them to copy the late Mr. Hervey. His dress, though it fits him, and he does not look amiss in it, is rather too gaudy and ornamented for a divine. He had a fine imagination, an elegant taste, and shows much precision and judgment in his choice of words: but, though his luxuriant manner of writing has many of the excellencies both of good poetry and good prose, it is in reality neither the one nor the other. An injudicious imitation of him has spoiled some people for writers, who, if they could have been content with a plain and natural mode of expression, might have succeeded tolerably well.

The pupil likewise must **write** as well as read; and he should write frequently. Let him fill one common-place book after another, with extracts from good authors. This method, while it tends to fix the passages, or their import, in his mind, will also lead him to make such observations respecting the order, and construction, and force of words, as will not so readily occur to his notice by reading only. Then let him try his own hand, and accustom himself to write his thoughts; sometimes in notes and observations on the books he reads; sometimes in the form of essays or sermons. He will do well likewise to cultivate a correspondence with a few select friends; for *letter writing* seems nearest to that easiness of manner which a public speaker should aim at.

I would not have his first attempts to speak publicly be in the preaching way, or even upon spiritual subjects. It might probably abate the reverence due to divine truth, to employ it in efforts of ingenuity. Suppose the tutor should read to them a passage of

history, and require them to repeat the relation to him the next day, in their own manner. He would then remark to them if they had omitted any essential part, or used improper expressions. Or they might be put upon making speeches or declamations on such occasions or incidents as he should propose. By degrees, such of them as are judged to be truly spiritual and humble, might begin to speak upon a text of Scripture, in the presence of the tutor and pupils; and I should hope this might, in due time, become a part of the morning or evening devotions in the family. But let them be especially cautioned not to *trifle* with holy things, nor *profane* the great subjects of Scripture, by making them mere exhibitions and trials of skill.

Thus, by combining much *reading* and *writing* with their attempts to *speak*, and all under the direction of a judicious tutor, I shall have a cheerful hope, that the pupils will gradually attain a readiness and propriety of speech; and, when actually sent out to preach, will approve themselves scribes well instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom, qualified to bring forth from the treasury of their knowledge and experience, things new and old, for the edification of their hearers.

And now I may draw towards a close. There are some branches of science, or what is so called, on which I lay but little stress. I have no great opinion of *metaphysical* studies. For morality and ethics I would confine my pupils to the Bible. The researches of wise men in this way, which have not been governed by the ord of God, have produced little but uncertainty, futility, or falsehood. My tutor will, I hope, think it sufficient to show the pupils how successfully these wise and learned reasoners reciprocally refute each other's hypothesis. And, if he informs them more in detail of the extravagancies which have been started concerning the nature and

foundation of moral virtue; or of the dreams of philosophers, some of whom would exclude matter, and others would exclude mind, out of the universe; He will inform them likewise that he does not thereby mean properly to add to their stock of knowledge, (for we should, in reality, have been fully as wise if these subtitles had never been heard of,) but only to guard them against being led into the mazes of error and folly, by depending too much on the reveries of philosophers.

After this delineation of my plan, it will be needless to inform you, that I do not propose my academy to be a spiritual hot-bed, in which the pupils shall be raised, and ripened into teachers, almost immediately upon their admission. I have allowed for a few excepted cases; but, in general, it is my design, that their education shall be comprehensive and exact. I would have them learn before they undertake to teach; and their sufficiency to be evidenced by a better testimonial than their own good opinion of themselves. "A scribe well instructed," "a workman that needs not to be ashamed," "an able minister of the New Testament," are Scriptural expressions, intimating what ought to be the qualifications of those who undertake the office of a preacher or pastor. The apostle expressly forbids a *novice* to be employed in these services. And, though in the present day this caution is very much disregarded by people who undoubtedly mean well, yet, I believe, the neglect of Scriptural rules (which are not arbitrary—but founded in a perfect knowledge of human nature) will always produce great inconveniences. I shall think a young man of tolerable abilities makes a very good improvement of his time, if the tutor finds him fit for actual service, after three or four years' close attention to his studies.

But what have I done? In compliance with your request, I have been led to give such an undisguised view of my sentiments on this interesting subject, that, though I feel myself a cordial friend to all

sides and parties who hold the head, and agree in the grand principles of our common faith, I fear lest some of every party will be displeased with me. I rely on your friendship, and your knowledge of me, to bear witness for me, that I would not willingly offend or grieve a single person. And you can likewise testify, that I did not set myself to work; that I was much surprised when you proposed it to me; and that you have reason to believe my regard for you, and for the design you informed me of, were the only motives of my venturing upon the task you assigned me.

I have by no means exhausted the subject, though I hope I have not omitted anything that very materially relates to it. If I was really in Utopia, and to carry my plan into execution, other regulations would probably occur which have at present escaped me.

What I have written I submit to the candor of you and your friends; adding my prayers, that the Great Head of the Church, the Fountain of Grace, and Author of Salvation, may direct your deliberations, and bless you with wisdom, unanimity, and success, in whatever you may attempt for the honor of his name, and the good of souls.

I am, dear sir, your sincere friend and servant,
John Newton, May 14, 1782

John Newton's Letters to His Wife

Towcester, August 12, **1755**.

My dearest,

Before this reaches you, your brother will have told you how easy and composed he left me. Indeed, I wonder at myself. But the Lord has been very gracious to me, and fulfils his promise of giving me

strength according to my day. My mind is not distressed. My companions in the coach are civil and agreeable in their way; but I had rather have been alone; for to commune with God and my own heart, would be much more pleasing than the empty, amusing chit-chat I am engaged in at present.

I was enabled this morning to commend you to the Lord's blessing, with much comfort. And I have a cheerful hope that He will raise you up in due time; and that we shall again have a happy and thankful meeting. Until then, let us attend to present duty, and keep close to him by humble prayer, and a renewed dependence upon the blood of Jesus. Let us, while the *rod* is upon us, inquire into the *meaning* of it, and hear his *voice* by it; let us bow to his chastisement, and acknowledge that we have rebelled against him, and that he afflicts us far less than our iniquities have deserved. Then we may be assured, that though He causes grief, He will have compassion; and will not only deliver us—but give us to see, and to say, that *it was good for us to have been afflicted*.

I esteem it a mercy that you found some mitigation of your pain, and some symptoms of amendment, before I left you. But, had I been called away in the hour of your greatest extremity, I ought to have relied on the Lord's goodness, and to have been resigned to his will. But, alas! how weak is my faith!

I am in perfect health, and not uneasy for you. To be sure I think of you continually—but my trust in God bears me up. I shall endeavor to write by every post—but, if one should pass me upon the road, I hope you will not be anxious. The Lord is my guard and my guide.

Litchfield, August 13, 1755.

Thus far I am brought in safety, and am not willing to trust the post any further, and therefore must be brief. I met Mr. T____ at Daventry, and requested him to send you word how cheerful he found me; fearing you would scarcely believe my own report, unless I had someone to vouch for me. I shall be glad to hear a like account of you—but I know who has the care of you, and what good ground I have to trust him. I hope my first news will be, that your recovery is advancing. Many prayers to this effect I have offered, and am every hour adding to the number, though not with the solemnity I could wish. For we have hitherto found no much company upon the road, and have come in so late, that I have not had the opportunity of a single retired room. This the only inconvenience I have met with. But I know I do not serve a hard master. I pray to Him who can hear the breathings of my thoughts, when in the midst of company, and who is more ready to hear than I am to ask.

I hope you, my dearest, will continue waiting upon Him—for from Him only our help can come. Pray for a praying spirit; lay all your hopes and all your fears before Him. In this way, and in no other, peace and comfort will be surely found. I recommend you to His blessing, and remain, beyond expression,

Liverpool, August 15, 1755.

I cannot write much tonight—but I must tell you, in a few words, all is well. I have met with the usual kind reception from our dear friends—have done my business at the Custom-house, and received many congratulations. I have a holiday until Monday, and shall then enter upon my office. As there are two surveyors, and I shall be upon the river only every other week, the place is likely to afford me leisure, which, in its turn, will be as welcome to me as money. Well,

since the Lord has given me so many blessings, shall I not trust him throughout? Yes, I thank him, I hope I am warranted to say, *I can, and do*. My thoughts were much interrupted while in the coach; but I had a pleasant ride indeed from Warrington, and was led to be astonished at my many mercies, and to resign both you and myself into the hands of God, with much satisfaction.

I have received your brother's letter, and I thank him for his punctuality. As the Lord is pleased to give you intervals of ease and sleep, so I know he can remove all your pains by a word; and I trust he will in the best season. May he, at present, sanctify his hand, to the increasing of our faith and patience! Amen.

Liverpool, August 20, 1755.

I have received your sister's obliging letter, with your own dear name, in your own dear hand, at the bottom. A welcome sight! May I be thankful!

I entered upon business yesterday. I find my duty is to attend the tides one week, and to visit the ships that arrive, and such as are in the river; and the other week to inspect the vessels in the docks, and thus alternately the year round. The latter is quite easy—but the former requires pretty constant attendance, both by day and by night. I have a good office, with fire and candle, fifty or sixty people under my direction, with a handsome six-oared boat and a coxswain, to row me about. Mr. W*** went with me on my first cruise down to the Rock. We saw a vessel, and wandered upon the hills, until she came in. I then went on board, and performed my office with all due gravity. And, had it not been my business, the whole might have passed for a party of pleasure.

Today the wind blows hard; but you need not be uneasy about me at such times. For, though my department will lead me to be much upon the river, it is at my option to embark or not, as I find the weather. I like my station, and shall soon be master of it. Remember that I am in the path of duty, and under the protection of Him whom the winds and seas obey.

I perceive that you have thoughts of removing to Eltham. I pray the Lord to direct you when and where to go; and that his presence may be with you, to preserve you from being hurt by unsuitable company, so as to forget the vows you have offered in the time of your trouble. I hope our late trial will be sanctified to us, and that while we live we may have cause to say, that God is gracious and merciful—even in afflicting us. If your health should be fully restored, let us remember it is but a *reprieve*. We must experience, sooner or later, another, and a final visitation, to put an end to all our views which are bounded with the term of this frail life. Happy shall we be, if, when that hour arrives, we shall be found ready, and enabled, by faith in our Redeemer to withstand and overcome the shock of the last enemy, death.

I hope and trust we are yet spared that we may recover our strength, before we go hence, and are no more seen. I hope, if the Lord is pleased to conduct you safely to me, and to give us a house of our own, we shall act, in some measure, suitably to our obligations for so many deliverances and restorations as we have known; and learn to trust in his providence, and no more offend him by our unbelieving fears. I hope in a few more posts to have the pleasure of a letter of your own writing. But do not attempt it too soon. It is not necessary to make me easy. For I have been helped to trust you to the Lord's care, with few intervals of anxiety, since I left you.

Liverpool, August 24, 1755.

The good hand of God has brought me safely through a bustling, tempestuous week. I am to keep watch tonight, until about two o'clock. But do not pity me. I shall be most of the time beside a good fire, reading, writing, and, at intervals, praying for you and myself. I hear you are still upon the recovery, for which I wish to be thankful. But, alas! how much am I otherwise! I seem almost to forget the bitter time we both have lately known, and to be nearly impatient to see you here. But do not think me uneasy; I assure you I am not. But I cannot help feeling that you are not with me. Tomorrow my week of rest begins; then some of my friends may expect to hear from me. Of late I have only had leisure to write to you. Be cheerful and dependent. Make *use* of means prescribed for restoring your health—but do not *rest* in them. The blessing must be from the great Physician. To him let us apply for it; and ascribe to him all the praise if we obtain relief.

Liverpool, August 26, 1755.

I hope I am not capable of undervaluing any of your former letters—but surely this now in my hand is the most pleasing and welcome one I ever received. May the Lord make me thankful that you are again able to hold a pen. Your brother repeatedly encouraged me with hopes of your recovery, when, as I now find, you were in the greatest pain and danger.

There is something so close and pertinent in the little you have written, that I am filled with joy. I have hardly known you allow,

until now, that you were enabled to pray. *We may praise God for that pain or sickness, however severe, which teaches us, in good earnest, to call upon Him.* You have been in trouble, you called upon him, and he has delivered you according to his word. What shall we render to Him for all his mercies! Alas! we are poor, and can render nothing of our own. But he will not despise the efforts of a thankful heart.

I wish you well to Eltham. I fear the company there will not be quite suitable to the present state of your mind. But I trust you will keep a strict guard over yourself, and redouble your prayers to the God of all grace, to preserve you from evil. Secure seasons for retirement, and let not the world break in upon you, until you have daily committed and dedicated yourself to Him, who has raised you from the borders of the grave!

Liverpool, September 2, 1755.

The strain of your letters now makes me think light of our *temporary separation*. Be not afraid—only believe. The Lord Jesus, whom you need and seek, invites you, and has declared, *Whoever comes to Me—I will never cast out.* By nature, we all dislike his Gospel, and see no excellence in his person that we should desire him; if this is not your disposition at present, the change already wrought is his work. He is not like the unwise, inconsiderate builder: whatever he *begins*, he is both able and willing to *finish*. You have cause to lament the backwardness and hardness of your heart, (the Lord alone, knows how hard and backward mine is!) but let not this cast you down; He can take away the heart of stone! Nor think it strange if now, upon your setting your hand to the plough, the enemy should assault and trouble you. He will, if permitted, tempt you to suspect the reality of

all that you have experienced; he will set your sins in order before you, and persuade you, if possible, to look into *yourself* for *qualifications* and *conditions* of acceptance. But answer him from the Word of God, and tell him that he is a liar, and the father of lies.

Christ not only has mercy for the unworthy, the ungrateful, and perishing sinner—who cannot offer one plea (as from himself) why he should be spared; but it was purposely for those who answer to this character, that he came into the world to die, that he might save them to the uttermost. He gives qualifications indeed—but he requires none from us. Perhaps this enemy will quote Scripture against you, and press such texts upon your mind as might lead you to form hard conclusions against yourself. But you will bear this, if you consider that he had the impudence to assail our Lord himself in this manner, Matthew 4. This Jesus whom you seek, was in all points tempted and afflicted (sin excepted) like unto us. He has tasted suffering and anguish of mind, as well as death, for all his followers. Therefore He is a high priest who can have compassion upon our infirmities, and is able to succor them that are tempted, and knows what temptations mean.

Go on, my Dearest, I trust you are in the right way; wait patiently upon the Lord. Do not cast away the confidence you express in his mercy, for in keeping it you will find a great reward. Greater is He who is with us, than he who is in the world. Changes you must expect. The Christian life is a warfare; and though the Captain of our salvation, by conquering for us, has secured us the final victory, we may be sorely pinched, and sometimes wounded, while on the field of battle; but there is healing balm provided, and He will be always near to apply it. There may be fighting without and fears within; but He is faithful who has promised, who also will do it.

I have been so affected and engaged by the former part of your letter, that I have not time to answer the other particulars. It is my boarding week again, and the weather is bad. But fear not for me; I am in safe hands!

Liverpool, September 5, 1755.

On the stormy night you mention, I was safe in bed. I have been but once upon the river this week. The wind blew very hard then, it is true; but I was in no danger. I hope a little practice will teach you to trust me with equal ease, at all times, and in all places, where my *duty* calls me.

When you come hither, you will perhaps be more thankful for my being settled on shore, from what you will observe of the anxiety of those who have husbands, or parents, or children at sea, in the way of the approaching war. From such fears you will now be exempted; you will no more have to wait eight or ten months in suspense. When I think of my settlement here, and the manner of it, I see the appointment of *Providence* so good and gracious, and such a plain answer to my poor prayers, that I cannot but wonder and adore!

These circumstances which fixed my lot here, appear to me extraordinary, though of a piece with many other parts of my singular history; and the more so, as, by another *mistake*, I missed the land-waiter's place, which was my first object, and which, I now see, would not have suited us nearly so well. I thank God I can now look through *instruments* and *second causes*, and see his wisdom and goodness immediately concerned in fixing my lot. He knows our needs and our infirmities. He knows what indulgences may, by his blessing, promote our real good, and excite us to praise his name;

and what those are which might be *snares* and *temptations* to us, and prove hurtful. And He knows how to bestow the one, and to withhold the other. He does all things well!

Liverpool, September 7, 1755.

I wish you well in the country, and in what part you best approve. To be sure, I rejoice to see you—but I hope I shall not be impatient. However, when you are able, the sooner the better for your own sake, as bad roads and cold weather are approaching; and all the doctors here think that such an effectual change of air would strengthen you; but they have already mistaken your case. I wish you to come when you think you can travel as I mentioned, so as to hold out four or five hours, setting out late and putting up early; if you can thus advance only twenty miles in a day, it will bring you to me in time. But I only give my opinion; I leave you to your own prudence, or rather to the direction of Divine Providence, which, I trust, you will both seek and find, and to which I recommend you with a humble confidence. Many inquire after you, are pleased to hear of your amendment, and hope to see you soon. I say, *Amen*, at the Lord's best time. Until then may he sanctify our separation, and enable us to trust his precious promises and tried faithfulness.

Liverpool, September 9, 1755.

I will not own, as you do, that I am *indolent*—but I am rather *weary*. I am thankful for the account you give of your health, appetite, and color. I hope your strength will return soon, and I shall wait with cheerful patience until it does. When it shall please God to bring us

together again—I hope we shall strengthen each other's hands. Let us pray for this, while we are yet separated, that we may not be left any more to live to *ourselves*—but to *him*; and may look upwards and forwards, to be prepared for the next trial—for sooner or later more will come!

The town is almost in mourning, because the *stage-players* are gone. On their last night, the house was filled by four o'clock. Gaiety and dissipation of all kinds increase daily here; when this frivolous spirit will stop, I know not. For myself, I live easy and retired, three or four hours every day, in my apartment, if business will permit. I need no diversions, and walking or reading are my only amusements, for I keep very little company; but my time is far from hanging upon my hands. I lack nothing that this world can afford to amend my situation—but to have my dearest wife with me, and for this, the Lord's time will be the best.

Liverpool, September 12, 1755.

I shall take care to write upon *large* paper, as you desire. But I believe the smaller may suffice for today. Most of my leisure this week will be taken up with Mr. *George Whitfield*, from whom I hope both for comfort and benefit. He came to town on Wednesday, preached on that evening, twice yesterday, and so will continue preaching twice a day while he stays. We shall try to keep him until Monday; though he says he never was in a place where he had so little encouragement to stay as here. I made myself known to him the first night; went to see him, and conversed with him the next morning, when he invited me to supper. I went home with him from the preaching, and stayed until ten o'clock. May the Lord yet give him to see, that his labor of love among us is not in vain! But surely

this is the most unconcerned town, for its size, in the kingdom. I hope he is sent to awaken some of the people out of their *false peace*. However he is, as he was formerly, very helpful to me. He warms my heart, makes me more indifferent to cares and crosses, and strengthens my faith.

I find you are making acquaintance with Mr. M____. Well, go on; I hope you will leave London soon, or you will be thought as *peculiar* as your husband. To speak seriously, it makes my heart glad to see in you one mark of a real believer, in that you love the ministers and people of the Lord, and are not offended with the Gospel, which is a stumbling-block and *rock of offence* to many. May he carry on his work, and build you up in knowledge, faith, and much assurance. Amen. Think of me as always thinking of you—and praying for you.

Liverpool, September 16, 1755.

Mr. Whitfield left us yesterday morning; I accompanied him on foot a little way out of town, until the chaise overtook us. I have had more of his company than would have come to my share at London in a twelvemonth. I heard him preach nine times, supped with him three times, and dined with him once at Mr. F____'s, and on Sunday, he dined with me. I cannot say how much I esteem him, and hope, to my dying day, I shall have reason to bless God in his behalf. Having never been here before but one night, he was not known or regarded by the *fashionable folks*, though several of them went to hear him. But many of the poorer sort are inquiring after him with tears.

I commenced an acquaintance yesterday with a godly man, who lately lost his wife. He is the very picture of sorrow. I attempt to comfort him, though I succeed but poorly. It is only *God* who can

give comfort in such a case. Yet I think few can be more capable of sympathizing with him than myself. What I have lately gone through is fresh upon my mind. And why was not the event the same to me? Every way I am distinguished. My prayers turn much upon the thoughts of our future settlement. It will require both prudence and resolution to set out right from the first; but, if we ask of God, it shall be given us. I would have you gradually prepare for such a house as it will be our duty and privilege to keep; where God may be worshiped, and nothing practiced or permitted that is contrary to our Christian profession.

Liverpool, September 19, 1755.

I follow you in my mind to Eltham, Bromley, etc. though I know not the country. May the Lord be with you wherever you go, make known to you his covenant, and assure you of an unalienable interest in it.

I thank you for the account of Mr. B____'s sermon. You will observe, that the principal effects or properties of Abraham's faith, by which he walked with God, were *humility* and *integrity*. He humbled himself before the Lord in secret, claiming no higher title than 'dust and ashes'. And he stood up boldly, as his avowed, devoted servant, before men. Let us imitate him. I little doubt but he was thought peculiar, and perhaps laughed at, and so probably shall we. But I trust God's grace will make us scorn-proof, and not allow us to be in the number of those who are ashamed of the Lord Jesus and His Gospel. No, I hope he will enable us to glory in the cross, and to endure the opposition we may meet with, as seeing Him who is invisible, who, when upon earth, submitted to be laughed to scorn himself, for us. He having borne our reproach, has a just right to require that we should be ready and willing to bear reproach for him.

If the present fair weather continues, the road will be good to Warrington, where it will suit me rather better to meet you. But, if you come by Chester, I can bring you by water in a pilot-boat very cleverly. Be sure, that, for the sake of saving a little expense or time, you do not overwork your strength. I could go on for an hour, in giving you foolish directions and precautions for your journey; but, after all, it is best to leave you to the *care of the Divine Providence*, and to submit the method of your route to your own judgment.

Liverpool, September 23, 1755.

I pray the Lord to direct and strengthen you, and to give me a joyful sight of you again. My poor weak heart sometimes rebels, and I almost complain because you are not yet able to come. But this humor seldom lasts a full minute, before my thoughts recur to the day when I left London, and that silences me at once.

I go on making useful acquaintances. The Lord honors me in the eyes of his own people, which is the honor I most desire. And though some of the wags of my acquaintance have given me the name of *young Whitefield*, from my constant attendance upon him when he was here, it does not grieve me; and perhaps, if they would speak the truth, they do not think the worse of me in their hearts. I find I cannot be consistent and conscientious in my profession, without incurring the charge of *singularity*. I shall endeavor to act with prudence, and not give needless offence; but I hope I shall never more be ashamed of the glorious Gospel.

Liverpool, September 26, 1755.

May the Lord unite us, still more closely, in his faith and fear!

When I first asked Mrs. D____ to hear Mr. Whitefield, she could hardly give me a civil answer, (though otherwise she is very obliging and respectful.) But curiosity, or a better motive, prevailing, she went on the second day. She returned very well disposed; and asked me if I had any of his printed sermons. I lent her a volume. She went to hear him again, and became his great admirer. She herself first proposed my asking him to dinner; and his behavior there, confirmed her respect for him. I invited four or five Christian friends to partake of his company. She provided a handsome dinner, and when I spoke of the additional expense, she said she was very willing to bear it; but I do not intend that she shall. She has borne the *reproach* and *laugh* of many of her neighbors very well. They call her a *Methodist*, and she seems as easy under the charge as I am. So, we see—very *unlikely* things may be brought about!

Liverpool, September 30, 1755.

I must transcribe part of a letter from Mr. W____. "I have several times had the pleasure of conversing with your wife. God has been pleased to give her a great measure of your spirit," (so he writes.) "She is neither afraid nor ashamed to own her profession. After a sermon of Mr. B____, on Psalm 25:14, she told me, that the hearing of the Great Physician had done her more good than all her other medicines."

May the Lord help you to go on, and to increase! Now, methinks, I am happy indeed! Now my highest wishes are answered, if my dearest wife is partaker of the same blessed hope with myself. How pleasant will all the future comforts and blessings, which the Lord

may be pleased to afford us, prove, if we can discern them conveyed to us in the *channel of redeeming love!* How pleasant will it be, to look beyond them all, and, as the apostle speaks on another occasion, not to think that we have attained anything as yet, comparatively speaking, even when we have all we can wish for—but still to press forward in our hopes and views, towards the prize of our high calling in a better world, where our pleasure will be without abatement and without end!

Since you were so ready to believe me when I said I had not been well—why could you not take my word about my recovery? For shame, my Dearest, these fears and distrustful thoughts passed with us once—but we must aim above them now. Let us have no more *idolatry*—if we value each other's peace, or are willing to avoid such fiery trials we have lately known. However, whether you can believe me or not, I must tell you again, that I am in good health. May the Lord be with you where you are, and in your journey when you move this way; and may we trust and serve him, according to what he has done for us!

Liverpool, October 3, 1755.

I am not sorry that you complain of your evil heart; for, since our hearts will always be evil—it is a mercy to be *sensible* that they are so. Nor will I contradict you when you say, that you are ungrateful, and insensible to the Lord's goodness; only remember that you are so in common with other sincere Christians, and that there is not a person upon earth who knows himself—but must make the same complaint. I can find no words more suitable to my own case, than those which you make use of, only substituting your name for my own, "I delight, admire, and love to hang upon every sentence, and every action of my dearest Polly; and yet how lacking, and how cold, am I to the

gracious Author of all our mercies, to whom we owe each other, our happy affection, and all the satisfaction that flows from it!" He might justly have parted us long ago for my ingratitude; He might have shut out my prayers in your late visitation; but He has raised you up to a new life. Oh! that it may be so indeed!

I shall endeavor to temper my *zeal* with *prudence*. This you may be assured of—that you cannot live out a consistent profession of Christ's religion in this town, without incurring the charge of being *strange* and *singular*. And, unless you can confine yourself wholly to the mirthful and careless, and go all their lengths, you will certainly have *a bit of the cross to carry*, and must prepare yourself to be thought *very strange*, by some of your acquaintances.

I much more fear our being cowardly, than imprudent. But, if we are of the number of those whom the Lord will not be ashamed to own in the great day, he will give us a measure of grace, that we shall not be ashamed to own his cause and people, in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation. But, as you say, there is a way of doing things, I shall try to carry it handsomely to others. It is not necessary to affront or quarrel with any who have treated us civilly; but experience will convince you, that the less we are connected with worldly people, the better. And, as the Lord, by his providence, has placed us in a state of entire independence, and there is no consideration of trade or customers to prevent us from living, in all points, just as we please, I hope we shall judge better than to sacrifice our happiness and true interest, to an *empty sound*.

But I perceive that you, likewise, have picked up a fine set of *Methodist* acquaintances. Should your aunt know it—she would set you down as almost ruined! But I, who love you better than a thousand aunts could do, congratulate you upon the acquisition. You

may now see, by the examples before you, that *true religion has nothing in it of the unsociable or gloomy*; but is, on the contrary, the source of peace and cheerfulness. If, as you say, you love godly people, He who has inclined your heart to love them here, will give you a portion *with* them both here and hereafter. Upon this single evidence, the apostle John grounds an assurance of heaven, saying, "We know that we have passed from death unto life—because we love the brethren." We may, indeed, love a godly man upon other considerations; but to love him because he is godly, because we think we see the image of our Savior in him, and to love him most for the best parts of his character, is not possible until we have grace in our hearts; for, until then, we have an enmity to the Gospel. And, though this is not always visible and active, in people of mild and gentle dispositions, the farthest such can go is to say, I love the man because he is of a good life and behavior—but he has some strange, unaccountable whims and prejudices.

Liverpool, October 5, 1755.

I believe you do not guess how I am disappointed, when I receive only half a letter from you. Indeed, if writing is inconvenient to you, I could be content with half a line; but your excuse seems to suppose you are afraid of wearying me; for you say, "I shorten this merely because my last letter was so long." Well, I hope a few more posts will bring us together; in the mean time, let me have as much of you as you can conveniently commit to paper. I fear lest, by the pressing manner of my writing, you should sometimes think I wrong you by a suspicion that you will stay a day longer than needful. But indeed it is my happiness to believe that your heart is as much here as mine is at London. I cannot make you a more expensive compliment.

But, alas! where am I running? I forget my own duty and yours. I fear it is of the number of our great sins, that our hearts cleave so close to each other, and so little to the Lord; that we are so thoughtful about the future, and so negligent of the present. It is, at least, thus with me. I still feel that *you are my idol*, and though the Lord has lately afflicted you for my sake, and is now raising you up for me again, as it were from the grave, I am not yet instructed.

Liverpool, October 7, 1755.

I cannot express what I felt today while I was reading your dear letter, which informs me that you hope to set out next week; but you can guess for me. Ten thousand thoughts crowded upon me at once. The remembrance of that mournful, painful week at London, when I could only behold and share, and, by sharing, increase your distress, without procuring you the least help or ease, (which I hope I shall never forget while I can remember anything,) the situation in which we parted, when the Lord enabled me to hope against hope—the joy to think you now recovered from a most dangerous illness—the expectation of seeing you in a few days, and the former experience I have had, of what a happy meeting with you includes—all these different emotions of joy and sorrow, of love and gratitude, took possession of my soul at once. And is it so indeed? Shall I receive you soon as restored from the grave, and have all my pleasures heightened by the contrast of my late trials? Oh, then, what shall I render to the Lord for all his goodness? Could money or friends have helped us, you would have been relieved sooner—but there was no power in heaven or earth, that could restore ease to you or peace to me—but God alone.

To him, therefore, be the glory and the praise; all the glory and all the praise! And let us aim to declare his goodness, not merely in secret, or to each other—but in the whole course of our lives, by choosing what is pleasing to him, and avoiding what he hates. And especially, let us watch and pray against setting up our rest here below, and misplacing that regard upon each other, which is due only to him. May we be enabled to commit our dearest concerns, and have recourse in every trouble, to Him who has so often heard our prayers, and done us good. And, oh! that we may have that *moderation*, both in affection and practice, towards earthly things, which becomes those who profess themselves strangers and sojourners here, and who look for a better inheritance, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Surely it was our own folly that brought our late distress upon us. We had lived too much to ourselves, and had not glorified, as we ought, the God in whose hands our breath is, and whose are all our ways.

When Hezekiah was sick, near unto death, the Lord raised him up, and prolonged his life fifteen years. But we are told that *he rendered not according to the benefit he had received*, (2 Chronicles 32). Alas! how strongly does this charge lie against us! How often have we been restored to each other, after long and dangerous separations! How wonderfully have we been preserved from innumerable evils, to which, in such a world as this, we are hourly exposed! And yet it has now pleased God to give us a prospect of passing our days together comfortably, and free from many inconveniences which formerly affected us. But to keep us from growing too secure, just at the time He did this, He laid his hand upon you, and by one stroke brought us both down to the ground. Now again, He is returning in mercy, bringing us health, peace, and joy. Let us hear the *rod*, and *him* who has appointed it. For, if we come together yet again in a thoughtless ungrateful, self-seeking temper, he can again separate us, in a way

that we are not aware of. But, I hope and pray we shall be enabled to serve him from gratitude, and from a consideration of the great things He has done for us, rather than from a principle of slavish fear.

If you are really afraid of being an hypocrite, it is a good sign that you are not one. For the hypocrite is secure and confident, and has no suspicion of a mistake. But the most godly people upon earth must own, that though, through grace, they are not hypocrites, there is too *much hypocrisy remaining* in them. Their real and fundamental aim is the glory of God; but wretched, sinful, *SELF* creeps in, and taints their best performances. However, our comfort is, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from *all* sin. What a great word is that little word *all*! Not only from sins of one kind, or of one degree—but of all kinds, and of all degrees, when we apply to it in a truly humble and repenting spirit.

I was not angry with you for doubting of my health, (how do you think I can be angry with you at all?) I only meant to caution you against an overweening, distrustful care, which answers no good end—but is a species of sinful unbelief. And I foresee, that, against my judgment and experience, and notwithstanding all my grave admonitions to you, I shall too often offend in the same way, and you will have frequent occasions of giving me the same advice. But this is a part of our duty, and our privilege—to exhort and admonish each other, lest we should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

I was last night with Mr. and Mrs. ***. I think you will like their acquaintance. They are sober, sensible people, and seem very happy in each other. What a pity that the *one thing needful* should be lacking, when nothing else seems to be lacking! But so it was with us once; and it may be better with them hereafter.

Liverpool, February 2, 1756.

My dearest,

I would not give you occasion to think that the return of your birthday is less interesting to me at present, than it was seven years ago; or that my concern in it gives me less pleasure, now I am with you in Liverpool, than when I was exiled from you on the coast of Africa. It is a part of my happiness, and demands my daily acknowledgment and praise to God, that my regard for you is no more capable of being weakened by time than heretofore by absence. You will not expect me to address you in the strain of modern politeness—but I am persuaded that you will favorably accept what I may write, because you will approve of my motive and my sincerity.

I often wonder at the ill-timed festivity and gaiety with which the return of a birthday is usually observed. Multitudes, who, with respect to the past, can find little to make them reflect with pleasure on their having been brought into the world, and, with respect to the future, tremble, in the midst of all their *parade*, at the serious apprehension of death, yet agree to drown both the past and the future in noise and dissipation. For my own part, I see sufficient reason to make my birthday more especially a season of *serious reflection*. And I recommend the practice to you. For what is the language of a birthday? Has it not a warning voice, to remind us that another year of our time and opportunities is closed upon us, (time and talents for which we are accountable, and seasons which cannot be recalled,) and that death and eternity have advanced nearer to us by the stride of a whole year! And, therefore, I judge that a birthday is a very improper day for mortals to be frolicsome. To those whose hearts are deeply engaged in the things of this world, I would imagine the very thought of the occasion would be (like the hand-

writing on the wall to Belshazzar, Daniel 5) sufficient to put a full stop to their feast, and to turn their joy to heaviness. But such is our depravity, that, until grace touches the heart, the most obvious and most profitable truths can make no proper impression upon us. But I seem to forget that I am writing to you.

I am no enemy to joy; and I am sure the real Christian, who has peace with God and peace in his own conscience, has both the best title to joy, and the best disposition for it. I invite you to rejoice; but let it be in the right way, and in the right manner. "Rejoice in the Lord!" and "Rejoice with trembling!" Let us learn from the first, the sure grounds we have for rejoicing; and from the second, the many considerations which should correct and qualify our joy, that it may not deviate into a wrong channel, and become sinful and dangerous.

I say, "*Rejoice in the Lord!*" I congratulate you on your birthday; not to give you a vain complacency in yourself—but to lead you back to the time and circumstances of your birth, that you may reflect on the goodness of God. You were born of honest and affectionate parents, in easy circumstances, with a body neither diseased nor deformed, and a mind endued with rational faculties, with a soul formed for immortality, capable of loving and serving God here, and being happy with Him forever. Your lot was cast in a land favored with the Gospel, without which, all temporal blessings would have been of little worth; but if you take them together, and compare your own state with that of millions of your fellow-creatures, what great reasons have you to rejoice in this first view! But I would lead your thoughts forward from thence, step by step, through every succeeding year, to this day; through infancy, childhood, and especially *youth*, that dangerous period, in which such numbers make shipwreck of their hopes and prospects.

Must you not say, "Surely mercy and goodness have followed me all the days of my life." What sorrows, what sicknesses, what snares, have you either been exempted from, or preserved safely through? How many, within the circle of your own acquaintance, have died before they reached your term of life? How many, who are yet living, are suffering from evils to which you are equally exposed?

I make no scruple to number our happy marriage, among the blessings for which you see cause to be thankful; that it pleased God to bring us together, to bless us with a true affection, to restore us to each other after long separations, to recover us from long sicknesses, to fix us in our present situation, and, above all, to direct our hopes beyond the present world for our chief happiness. This is the *crowning* mercy! If the Lord has shown you and I those things which are hidden from many of the wise and prudent; if we know our *disease*, and our *remedy*, that we are sinners, helpless and hopeless, in ourselves—but sinners for whom a sure and free salvation is provided in Jesus Christ, and that we have ground to hope that we are interested in the pardons and promises of the Gospel; that the hairs of our head are numbered, and that all things are working for our good; that God will be our sun and shield here, and our portion forever; if these things are so, we may well rejoice—but still it must be in the Lord; for all our good, present and hoped for—is from him alone!

But I say, secondly, "*Rejoice with trembling!*" Our joy in this world cannot be *unmixed*. There are unavoidable things, which, though they cannot take it from us, will and ought to temper it; such as these—a sincere sense of our unsuitable returns for so many and great mercies. May God preserve us from that terror of mind on account of sin, which, sooner, or later, will be the portion of those who know him not! We need not be distressed, for though we have sinned—

Christ has died for sinners, and is able to save to the uttermost. Yet, certainly, we have much cause to grieve and be ashamed, that we have lived so long to so little purpose, that we have received so much and rendered so little, and that, after all our experience and resolutions, we are still so inactive and unstable in his service. The *snare*s, *temptations*, and *enemies* around us—may make us thoughtful, if they do not make us tremble. These would surely prevail against us at last, were not the Lord on our side.

We may almost tremble, likewise, for the sins of those among whom we live. Lot chose to reside in Sodom, because it was a pleasant country, and well watered; but the sins of the inhabitants soon made him forget the advantages of the place. His righteous soul was vexed, from day to day, by their ungodly deeds. And so shall we feel, if we have a due regard for the glory of God, the love of Christ, and the souls of our neighbors. We have likewise cause to tremble, when we think of the judgments that seem at present hanging over this sinful, insensible nation. We have just reason to fear lest mercy, so long despised, should be withdrawn. Let us, like good Eli, tremble for the ark of God. And in this view we may tremble for ourselves, for we have contributed our part to the filling up the measure of national iniquity. We have neither borne that testimony against sin in public, nor mourned for it in secret, as we ought. And though, I trust, it shall be well with us at last, who can tell what scenes of distress and difficulty we may be appointed to struggle through, while we are upon earth? And therefore we should tremble, while we rejoice.

I could enlarge my homily, would time and paper permit. In brief, you have, to my comfort, been spared to finish another year. The event of the next year is uncertain. I would therefore exhort you and myself, to live this year, as though it would, as though it certainly were to be, our last year. It may possibly prove so. Let us renew our

application to the throne of grace, and the blood of sprinkling. Let us pray that we may be always ready, that our hearts may be withdrawn from worldly things, and be fixed, trusting in the Lord. And then, come life, come death, let peace be continued, or troubles be multiplied, nothing shall be able greatly to move us.

Warrington, December 13, 1758.

My dearest,

Thus far it is well, and, I trust, shall be to the end. The weather is fine, the roads good, the horse free and easy. He has not started once; though he sometimes raises his ears.

Now and then I feel some twinges as being forced from you, though but for a season; but the cause makes amends. Three or four weeks will, I hope, re-unite us, and then, one hour will repay the pains of absence. Let us not wish away the interval—but make the most of it, for it will soon be over. The new scene of life which appears to be opening before us is very important. We have need to pray earnestly, constantly, for each other, and for ourselves. Make much of the means of grace; reserve seasons for retirement. Endeavor to avoid the company which you cannot improve, and to improve that which you cannot avoid. Adieu. May the peace of God here prepare you for his glory hereafter! Amen.

Hunslett, December 15, 1758.

I have received my title from Mr. C***, and shall proceed tomorrow. I can hardly be more happy, while separated from you, than at

present. Dear Mrs. A***, who is well, is sitting by me upon her husband's knee, while poor I, am like a dove without my mate. But I trust my time will come again. Until then, I can think, write, and pray; I can repeat your name a thousand times; and therefore I look at them now with a pleasure unmixed with envy. But I must not trifle. I expect soon to assume a character which ought, if possible, to wean me from every thought that terminates in *self* or *time*. Pray for me, my dearest, my hour of trial is at hand; a solemn hour, which will call for all my faith, strength, and zeal. But the needful supply is near. In our Lord there is a fullness of grace, a sufficiency for me, for you, and for all who seek it. May he give you that peace that passes all understanding, may he bless us while apart, and join us again to our mutual comfort, here for a time, and hereafter forever!

Chatham, December 25, 1758.

Though the Lord permits difficulties and hindrances to arise for the trial of our faith and patience, I cannot believe that he either disapproves, or will finally disappoint, my desire to serve him. I surrendered myself to his disposal without reserve, and I cannot wonder, nor ought I to complain, if He takes me at my word, and puts my sincerity to the proof. Mr. B*** doubts not but the Lord will give us more than He will call us to part with. Be this as it may, as to *filthy lucre*; if He gives us grace and peace; if He continues our affection, and preserves us to each other; if He is pleased to be with us in every trouble and exigency; if He affords us a clear evidence of our interest in a heavenly inheritance; if He favors us with a calm, believing, acquiescence in his will; if He honors us with usefulness in this life, and crowns us with glory in eternity—we shall surely have no cause for complaint. Once we reach heaven, we shall not think all

that we did, or suffered, too much for Him who loved us, and gave himself for us. *One glance of that happiness which shall endure forever, will abundantly overpay us for all the cares and fears we experienced during our earthly pilgrimage.*

I cannot express the satisfaction your dear letter gave me, in finding you so easy and resigned, upon the denial of my late attempt for the ministry. This is a mercy I would, if necessary, or possible, or lawful, have purchased at the price of a limb. Nothing disquieted me from the first of my design—but the fear of involving you in difficulties, or causing you uneasiness. But in this, as in a thousand instances, I have found the Lord to be a hearer of prayer. And I hope, and believe, He has a blessing in store for you upon this account. You know me too well to suspect me of flattery; I give you my plain advice, when I think it needful. It is a proof of my affection. But neither ought I to withhold deserved praise. You have, from the first rise of this affair, acted a part which perhaps few of your gender could equal. To make such sacrifices, so cheerfully, and upon such slender grounds, is not common. I can only say, it has not been lost upon me. My primary thanks, indeed, are due to the Lord, who gave you to me, and who gave you every qualification that could engage my heart, and gratify my utmost wishes in a wife. My next are due to you. The whole term of our union forms a series of many a proof of *recollected love*, as Thomson speaks. But nothing has more strongly enhanced my love and gratitude to you, than your conduct when we were last at Leeds, and ever since. Take courage, hold on, the end will answer your expectations.

I can say nothing as to particulars; but, in general, I am sure that none who put their trust in God shall be finally ashamed. I suppose you have your fits of fear and unbelief. I have likewise severely felt them at times. But mind them not; or turn them to advantage, by

making them occasions of more frequent and earnest prayer. For it is written, "Call upon me in trouble, and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." Let us be diligent in the means of grace; these are the paths in which the Lord has commanded us to walk, and where he has promised to meet us, and bless us. The enemy would gladly keep us from them, or make them burdensome; and he has too often prevailed. Should not experience make us wise? Has it not always been best with us—when we have been most diligent in prayer, most attentive to the Scriptures, and most disengaged from the world and from trifling company? Have we not found a vanity in everything but piety, especially when trouble has stared us in the face, or when pain or sickness have taken hold of us? Why, then, should we be fooled and deceived any more? Let us return to the Lord; there is forgiveness with him for the past, and supplies of grace suited to every coming need. None that come to him shall be cast out; none that rest on him shall be overthrown; none that love and serve him shall be unrewarded.

Loughborough, January 3, 1759.

I hope this will come in time, either to prevent or relieve your uneasiness on my account. Whatever you have suffered, or may suffer, for me, you shall be made amends, so far as gratitude will pass for payment, and so far as the study of my life can promote your satisfaction. If you have had fears for me, they were needless. And I hope you will in time learn to trust me, and all your concerns—to God, who cares for us.

I left London on Saturday about ten—but soon found I had a very stubborn horse. I have been obliged to travel his pace, for he positively refuses to travel mine; and though I tell him how impatient

I am to see my dear wife, he will not move one foot the faster. When I came to Barnet, I demurred about the road; at length I turned to the right, not knowing when I might have so good an opportunity of seeing the people I mentioned in my last letter.

I put up at Welling, sent a note to Dr. Young, and received for answer, that he would be glad to see me. I spent an hour with him. His conversation was agreeable, and much answerable to what I expected from the author of the *Night Thoughts*. He seemed likewise pleased with me. It would have surprised you to hear how I let my tongue run before this great man. He approved my design of entering the ministry, and said many encouraging things upon the subject; and, when he dismissed me, desired that I would never pass near his house without calling upon him.

I spent Sunday at Everton, and am glad I went, though it will cost me two days more absence from you. The first five miles from thence into the York road were, I think, the worst I had ever rode or seen. I was sometimes in fear for myself—but more frequently for my poor horse, lest I must have left him sticking in the clay, as a memorandum of my having passed that way. When I put up at night, I found that I had come about six miles beyond the place where I should have turned off. It was a poor day's journey—but eighteen miles in all, and six of them out of the way. On Tuesday, I was advised to keep on sixteen miles further, and I should find a road to Leicester. If I had missed this turning likewise, I would have missed some trouble and trepidation. I had thirty-three miles cross-road to go, and found much of it a cross-road indeed. Though the worst pieces of it, if taken together, were not above ten miles, I would rather go a hundred miles round, than travel it again. I am still a hundred miles from you—but I have no more kind friends, nor cross-roads to detain me. Thank the Lord for preserving me in health and

safety. My horse is recovered from his fright, and seems in better order than when I left London. I am likely to jog on by myself; for, if any people were going my way, they would hardly have patience to wait my horse's motions, nor would he mend his pace to please anybody. But I trust I am not alone, nor do I often feel a lack of any company but yours. Continue to pray for me. I trust we shall live to see the hand of God overruling everything for our benefit; and that every separation, inconvenience, or expense, occasioned by a desire of promoting his glory, shall be well made up to us in the best time.

Hunslett, May 17, 1759.

I cannot tell you how often your dear name has been in my mouth since I left you, nor how earnestly and frequently I commend you to the Lord's blessing. May He teach us to improve these short occasional separations. When I am absent from you—I most sensibly feel how dear you are to me; and what a heavy trial I would have, if God was to take you wholly from me. I ought to believe that He will enable me to bear whatever he may appoint, because such is his promise; but at present it seems, that a blow so near to my heart, would be long and deeply felt in every other circumstance of life, and that I would find pleasure in nothing but in bemoaning my loss. I doubt not but you have similar thoughts, upon the supposition of my being removed. May we therefore learn, in the first place, to be thankful that we have been so often restored, and so long preserved, to each other; and that our affection is still maintained inviolable and increasing; and, secondly, to be watchful and cautious, that we do not, by our *idolatry*, or *ingratitude*, render it necessary for the Lord, even in mercy, to wound us in the most sensible part, and to punish either of us in the person of the other.

London, July 4, 1760.

You did not bid me write, because, I suppose, you hardly thought I could refrain, for so many tedious days, from giving my mind a little vent. How often have I told you, that, whatever pleasure or amusement I may find in the company of friends, yet there is a peculiar something, that shares in, and gives an inexpressible cast to, every motion of my mind, when you are absent? A man deprived of his right hand, may go about his business with the same spirit and alacrity as in time past; yet everything he undertakes will necessarily remind and convince him of his loss. This, or something like it, I may have hinted a thousand times; but, as I write and speak from my heart, the thought occurs as readily to me as at the first, and I cannot easily avoid repeating it.

I am afraid of *idolatry*; I am afraid we have been, and still are, too guilty of the charge; and the Lord, to whom alone we belong, and to whom all our services and affections are primarily due, might justly, very justly, blast our *boasted paradise*. Yet we owe it to him that our souls are susceptible of tender and affectionate feelings. He formed us for each other, and his good providence brought us together. It is no wonder, if so many years, so many endearments, so many obligations, have produced an uncommon effect; and that, by long habit, it is become almost impossible for me to draw a breath in which you are not concerned. If this mutual affection leads us to the *Fountain* from whence our blessings flow, and if we can regard each other, and everything about us, with a reference to that *eternity* to which we are hastening, then are we happy indeed. Then, not even death (the dread of mortals, especially of those who live in the possession of their wishes) can greatly harm us. Death itself can only

part us for a little space, as the pier of a bridge divides the stream for a few moments—but cannot make a real separation. The friendly waters soon mix again, and, with one force and consent, press forward to the ocean.

Were it not for the support of believing that there is a brighter and a longer day beyond the grave, I would sink down in despair, and *starve*, if I may use a vulgar saying, *in the midst of plenty*. For, though I have known too much, not to smile at the cold disciples (if there are any such) of Platonic love; yet, methinks, a regard like ours is designed to flourish in a better world than this, and can never appear displayed to its full extent and advantage, until transplanted into those regions of light and joy, where all that is imperfect and transient shall be no more known.

Here, then, is the true plan of happiness for us; to consider that God, who made us, made us immortals; and appointed us to spend so many years in the most loving companionship, not only to sweeten the cares of life, and to render our path through this wilderness more easy—but chiefly that we might be helpful in animating each other in our progress to that kingdom and crown which is incorruptible and undefiled; a kingdom to which we are called by Him who died once, to purchase it for us, and now lives forever, to give us entrance into it.

Liverpool, August 6.

I am glad you ventured to London by water; for I wish you to strive against, and conquer, vain fears. The only way of doing this effectually, is by placing our hopes and fears where alone they are due. Let us pray for grace to fear the Lord, and his goodness, and

then we need not be afraid though the earth be moved, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea. Many a prayer I have put up for you, since I saw you. I hope the Lord will answer us for ourselves and each other. I hope you will not be lacking to pray for yourself. *Prayer is the great secret which gives the true relish to life.* When I can pray with some liberty, I find all goes on well; when I cannot, I have no real pleasure in anything. I believe I would not have begun my letter in so complaining a strain, if I was not much out of frame for prayer. Draw near to God—and he will draw near to you, is a maxim that we ought always to regard. Tomorrow I set off for Yorkshire. But how gladly would I give up the pleasure of visiting my friends there, to fly by the shortest road to you, that I might tell you by word of mouth, if I was able, how much I am,

Liverpool, June 14, **1762**.

You will, perhaps, wonder that I choose the formality of writing, when we have so many happy opportunities of exchanging hearts by discourse. But in this way I can collect my thoughts, and present them to you in one view. And you can likewise peruse and reconsider them at your leisure. Therefore, without further apology or preamble, I proceed to the point.

Though it is not necessary, it always gives me pleasure, to repeat how truly I love you, how much my happiness depends upon you, and that I never taste pleasure more sincerely myself, than when I am instrumental to the promoting of yours. And that, on the contrary, I account it among my most painful trials, if, either through inadvertence or necessity, I occasion you any uneasiness. I assume no merit from being able to say this. It amounts to no more than that I know when I am well. Besides, it is a just debt, in which I stand

bound for the innumerable obligations your affection daily increases upon me. I would be blind not to perceive, and ungrateful if I did not acknowledge, that you are not behind-hand with me in your inclination; and, from the turn of our circumstances, you have had fairer opportunities of showing what sacrifices you can make for my repose, especially within these last three years.

And still, it seems, the advantage is, and will be, on your side. I am still striving to decline the thoughts of an undertaking which, though otherwise I would think agreeable, has this momentous difficulty attending it—that it has not your full concurrence and approbation. If I thought myself in the path of duty, and had you on my side, methinks all trials would be comparatively light; but, when duty seems to call one way, and my regard for your peace seems to plead powerfully for another, how can I but be greatly perplexed?

Not but that I am well assured, if I told you I was at such a pinch that I could see no medium between grieving you, and acting against the light of my own mind, you would comply with any proposal I could make; and would rather suffer in silence, than see me at continual variance with myself. But such a consent would not satisfy me. The more you constrained yourself for me, so much the more would I be pained for you; and thus, by our sensibility, we would give each other greater trouble, in proportion as we endeavored to avoid it.

I hope, therefore, that I write this in a happy hour, and that the Lord, who has power over all hearts, (to whom we owe our all, and especially our mutual love,) will accompany it with his blessing, that I may not merely extort your consent—but obtain your full concurrence and approbation to my design. I much desire to enlarge my little attempts in the way of preaching, or expounding, (call it what you please,) in Liverpool. The wish of many here, the advice of

many absent, and my own judgment, (I had almost said my conscience,) are united on one side; which I think would preponderate against Mr. B***'s single sentiment, if your fears did not add weight to his scale.

The late death of Mr. Jones, of St. Savior's, has pressed this concern more closely upon my mind. I fear it must be wrong, after having so solemnly devoted myself to the Lord for his service, to wear away my *time*, and bury my *talents* in silence, (because I have been refused ministry in the Church of England,) after all the great things that He has done for me. And, should He throw me upon a sick bed, or visit you for my sake, I believe the sense of my cowardice and indolence, in this business, would greatly aggravate my distress.

I think there are but two possible objections against my purpose. The first is, that I would probably draw upon myself some of that scorn or opposition which, in a greater or less degree, is the usual portion of those who determine to be faithful. But, even if this was a weighty something, though indeed it is quite light when compared with the blessings promised to those who suffer for the truth, it is some encouragement to find, that after it has been publicly known, for more than a year, that several of my friends frequent my house on a Sunday evening, I have not had the least disturbance near home, nor been treated with the least disrespect or ridicule abroad, upon that account. And, if I procured a larger place to speak in, I might still go on as quietly. However, I am willing to venture.

The other objection, being started by prudence, ought to be attended to. But I think that, if I chose such times only as would not interfere with my business, I would run no hazard of losing my place. And this is the opinion of my immediate superiors in office, whom I have consulted upon the point. Nay, I know not but the diminutions I have

found in my emoluments may be owing to my hesitation. If I serve the Lord heartily, he will be answerable for consequences; but, if I continue to serve him by halves, and to rebel against the conviction of my mind, will it be any wonder that, when I look for much, it should come to little?

You know that I am not wholly incompetent, either as to knowledge or expression. Shall I flatter your regard for me by hinting, that perhaps a step of this kind may, in a little time, gain me more respect and estimation than I have yet known? But, I hope, we both wish to be governed by a nobler motive. It will be of little consequence, what the people of the world once thought of me, when they and we shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ!

You justly complain of dull Sabbaths. Let us then embrace the first favorable opportunity of aiming at what may more enliven them. You love to hear me speak, upon all occasions. And I think you have sometimes heard me with pleasure as a preacher. And you know not what blessings may be yet reserved for you. Perhaps the Lord may send you the greatest favors by the hand of him, from whom you are kind enough to accept the smallest trifle with complacence.

After all, as I have already said, I cannot be content with forcing your bare acquiescence. I beg, therefore, that you will think it over frequently, and entreat the Lord to direct us both. Perhaps, before long, it may seem to deserve your approbation. To hear you say so, would make me quite another person. For, while I remain in this suspense, I feel, at times, a burden which I can hardly bear, and cannot possibly shake off. May the Lord bless, guide, and guard you, and abundantly reward you for all your affection and kindness.

London, April 5. 1764.

Your poor husband has need of your prayers, that he may not forget himself amidst the many caresses he meets with. I hope I shall not—but my heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; and I can already see how *prosperity* blinds and hurts even people of good sense and much experience.

I cannot but be pleased to find so many truly *gracious* people in the higher scale of life. But I hope I could take as much pleasure in conversing with the poor of the flock. I think I could be happy at *Olney*, if the Lord made me useful to the people there, though neither they nor I should be spoken of beyond the bounds of the parish. I am glad you are pleased with the prospect; for no earthly consideration can animate me so much as to have our hearts and desires united in this point, as they are in everything else. What a blessing do I possess in our undivided, unabated, affection. May the Lord sanctify it, as a means to lead us both more closely to himself. We are comparatively happy now; but we shall not be completely so, until we arrive in the better world of perfect peace and purity!

My heart rejoices at the thoughts of soon meeting you at Liverpool; but what will that be, compared to the joy when we shall stand together before the throne of glory, free from every imperfection and trial; when we shall see Jesus as he is, be fully conformed to his image, and join in singing his praises forever! With what delight shall I then consider you as the instrument the Lord prepared to preserve me from ruin? And how will you praise him for our union, if he is pleased to make me, in any measure, useful to promote your faith and hope?

I cannot, as yet, judge how my affairs will terminate. If it pleases the Lord, if it is the right place and the right time—I shall succeed. But I

would have you prepared for what we call a *disappointment*. But *disappointments are neither more nor less than providential intimations of the will of God*.

London, April 12.

I was with the Bishop of Lincoln this morning, and he has fixed on next Monday for my examination. If I get safely through that scene, I suppose my ordination will soon follow. He received me with great civility and candor. The beginning of my interview with the Bishop of Chester was not so pleasing. I suspect that some person or people at Liverpool had written to him, and not in my favor. Great men, not being able to see everywhere with their own eyes, must depend upon information, and are liable to be imposed upon by *misrepresentation*. He said, that, before he could authenticate my testimonials, he must ask me some questions. But, when I showed him Lord D____'s letter, a full stop was put to all inquiries but what were agreeable. He became very sociable; kept me in chitchat nearly an hour; and, when I took my leave, he wished the much success.

I shall be glad to have this business fairly finished. My mind has been greatly unsettled. *Much company and frequent changes* do not well suit me. Friends smile and favor me on all sides; but *creature-regards* affect me too strongly, and I feel a degree of *dearth* in the midst of *plenty*. I hope I shall be better when we return to our old uniform way of life, so far as the expected change will admit of uniformity. I have been more familiar with the higher sort of life of late than formerly, and see it in its greatest advantage and beauty. But still my heart is at home; and I am fully convinced, that no assemblage of earthly things could make me more happy than I have

been, and hope to be again, in the moderate situation to which we have been accustomed.

I desire to praise God for the progress of your recovery; and begin now to think seriously of our move. How will you be able to travel, so soon after your long illness and confinement? But why do I look so far beforehand? Will not He, who has done so much for us, do what is still needful? I must break off. May the Lord bless and comfort you.

London, April 16.

Just in the apparent moment of success, new difficulties occurred, which seemed to threaten a total overthrow to my business—just as the poor sailor is sometimes alarmed with the apprehension of shipwreck, when his port is in view. But, as I trust all difficulties are now obviated, through the kind interference of Lord D____, to whom I have occasioned too much trouble, I shall say no more of them.

I waited on the Bishop of Lincoln this morning, have reason to revere him for his candor and tenderness. The examination lasted about an hour, chiefly upon the *principal heads of divinity*. As I was resolved not to be charged hereafter with dissimulation, I was constrained to dissent from him in some points. But he was not offended; he declared himself satisfied, and has promised to ordain me, either next Sunday, in town, or the Sunday following, at Buckden. Let us praise the Lord!

London, April 20.

What thanks do I owe to the Lord, for all his goodness to me! He made me willing to resign all, and to enter upon a very obscure and limited service, for the sake of his Gospel; but, when it came to the point, he mercifully interposed to prevent it. I ascribe it to his goodness—that my application to the Archbishop, six years ago, did not succeed. There is now a probability of my being comfortably fixed, in a more agreeable connection. May he keep me humble and dependent, and all will be well. But I see some striking and unexpected instances of the great danger to which the countenance and friendship of *people of distinction* may expose a minister. We are poor, weak, inconsistent creatures, if left but a little to ourselves. "Hold me up—and I shall be safe!" Psalm 119:117

My next acknowledgments are due to Lord D____. He has greatly interested himself in my behalf. Considering his rank and some other circumstances, I might wonder that he should submit to take so much trouble, did I not observe, from other instances, that he thinks not of himself, where there is any probability that his influence can procure benefit to others.

As I have a little leisure time, I must fill up the paper; but how? I can repeat that I love you, that I continually offer up prayers and thanks on your behalf. I can tell you again, as I have told you a thousand times, that your dear person, your affection, and all its interesting proofs and pledges, are deeply engraved on my heart. Oh! what do I owe, what do we both owe—to the God of our lives! Shall not the *mercies* we possess in each other, though great and valuable in themselves, be much more so in their effects? Shall they not lead us higher, and prove as *steps* by which we may rise to a still greater happiness? Yes, I trust so! When I look back with wonder to see how the Lord has led us thus far, by a way which we knew not, I am encouraged to hope that the *end* will crown the whole. How gracious

has he been to me, in preserving me from innumerable troubles into which I have been ready to plunge myself; and in giving me so many advantages and friends! How gracious has he been to you, in visiting you seasonably, yet gently, from time to time; in mitigating your illness; preserving and composing you during my absence; in permitting you again to go abroad!

And now, I hope, you have a change of situation before you, which will prove to your comfort in every respect. It is true, as you observe, if we move to *Olney*, we shall not be wholly without trials. They are inseparable from this mortal state, and they are necessary to discipline us, and to keep us from wandering. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your Word!" Psalm 119:67. "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees!" Psalm 119:71. Let us, therefore, guard against resting in the *creature*. Let us pray for submission to the will of God, and that we may welcome every event, from a sense of his hand being concerned in it, and a persuasion (which his promises warrant) that, some way or other, all shall conduce to our final advantage. "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose!" Romans 8:28

Buckden, April 28.

I have waited upon the Bishop this afternoon; have gone through all the previous forms, and am to be ordained (if the Lord pleases) at eleven tomorrow.

I hope the repeated intimations I have given you concerning this *long-expected tomorrow*, have been in time to engage you in earnest prayer for me. I now almost *stagger* at the prospect before me. My

heart is in some measure, though I dare not say, suitably affected. I am to stand in a very public point of view, to take the charge of a large parish, to answer the incessant demands of stated and occasional services, to *preach* what I ought—and to *be* what I preach. Oh! what zeal, faith, patience, watchfulness, and courage will be needful for my support and guidance! My only hope is in the name and power of Jesus. May that precious name be as ointment poured forth to your soul and mine! May that power be triumphantly manifested in our weakness!

I purpose now to cross the country to *Olney*, just to peep at the place and people, and to take the Liverpool coach at Stony-Stratford. If so, we may meet on Thursday. My heart jumps at the thought. But the Lord's time will be the best!

Buckden, June 14.

I came hither in safety, about eleven this morning. I have been twice at prayers at the chapel. The Bishop received me very kindly. Whether I have a second examination to go through or not, I cannot yet tell.

I understand I cannot be dismissed very soon on Monday; so that it will probably be tea-time before I am with you. I think you will trust me not to make any unnecessary delay. You know where I left my heart. And that, even if I was in a much more agreeable situation than at present, I would break through all for your sake, and prefer the little vicarage of *Olney* with you in it—to the palaces of kings without you!

I meet here with many candidates for orders—but I know not that there is one of my own turn of heart and mind. However, they are all very civil; and I endeavor to accommodate myself to them, as far as duty and conscience will permit.

I pray the Lord to fill your heart with his love. Then you will bear my absence as easily as we can bear the lack of a *candle* when the *sun* shines in his noon-day strength. Pray for me, and for yourself. And remember that, amidst the many things which require a degree of our attention, one thing is more especially needful. I commend you to his grace and blessing.

Olney, July 12.

Your letter (as you will believe) was very welcome. I desire to be thankful for your safe journey. I set off the moment the coach was out of sight, and had a pleasant walk home. As I was passing through Emberton, an old woman came after me, and invited me to her cottage. Five or six more women soon joined us. We talked, sung a hymn, and I prayed. I thought it a good place along the way.

I am well, and as comfortably settled as I can desire, during your absence. I feel the lack of your company—but hope to bear it without anxiety. I cannot wish to love you less; I hope it is impossible. But I wish for us both, that our regard for each other may be *sanctified*, and kept in due subordination. While I rejoice, that we are so happily sensible of what we owe to each other, I have cause to mourn that our love to him should be so faint and disproportionate. His love to us passes knowledge. He loved us, when we were enemies, with a love beyond expression; a love, that exposed him to ignominy and

torture, that cost him his blood and his life; a love, that makes over to those who believe in him—all the riches of grace and glory!

You need not propose Mr. T____'s case to me as a caution. Our situations and constitutions are different. However, I shall try to be prudent and careful. But our times are in the Lord's hands. He who preserved me at Liverpool, will preserve me at Olney, so long as he has service for me to do. Beyond this, I have no great desire to live, unless upon your account. And, I trust, he will spare me while it is needful, and good for you. If we have an eternity to spend together in his praise, it is no great matter who is removed first, or how soon. All our tears will be then wiped away. "For to me—to live is Christ and to die is gain!" Philippians 1:21. "I desire to depart and be with Christ—which is better by far!" Philippians 1:23

All our friends here seem to vie in civility; and those who are not friends are kept quiet. I hope not to provoke them by any part of my behavior; but, if they will be offended with me for *speaking the truth*—I cannot help it. As to provision, I am quite easy about it. The Lord, who brought me from Africa, where I was destitute of everything; who has given you to me, and dealt so bountifully with us hitherto, will not allow us to lack any real good, now he has so visibly displayed his power and providence in placing me here.

Olney, July 14.

I observe what you say about Hampstead. It seems a situation in some respects desirable; and, was I only to consult my affection for you, I would wish to see you in more agreeable circumstances than I can expect to procure you here. But we have striking examples to remind us of the *danger of choosing for ourselves*, and being *dazzled*

by great prospects. I am well convinced, that the Lord brought us hither; and, without as clear an intimation of his will, I hope I shall not indulge a wish for a removal. The people love me; express a warm desire for my continuance; our assemblies are crowded, and I hope the Lord makes my preaching useful. While things bear this pleasing appearance, I would not only be ungrateful to the Lord and my friends—but blind to my own comfort, if I listened to a new offer.

My health continues good, and I can hardly form a wish but for you. But when, which is very often, I think of the distance between us, I give a little sigh, and long to see you. I pray many times in a day for your peace and establishment in grace; and I rejoice in the hope that God is gently drawing you to himself, by the alternate inducements of light afflictions—and weighty comforts and favors. Let this be your encouragement and mine, that no one ever sought him (in the way of his own appointment) in vain. Though he may seem to delay, he will surely come, and overpay our expectation. For myself, I have been brought, almost imperceptibly, thus far. When I think how cold, dull, and heartless, I have been; how often I have wandered, how often trifled upon the brink of temptation; when I consider what powerful, vigilant, and subtle enemies are combined against me, and how many *professors* have fallen on my right hand and my left—I am amazed at the greatness of his mercy in preserving me. I am a living commentary, that there is forgiveness with him; and that he is able to save to the uttermost!

Olney, July 21.

The account you give me of the gentleman who dined with you, is very affecting. Every loss is gain, that is overruled to bring the soul home to God. But the Lord has dealt still more favorably with us.

How often have we deserved to be separated! Yet we are spared to each other. May our lives praise him, and may we be freed from *idolatry*! To love each other, and dearly too—is no sin; nay, it is our duty. But He will not allow a *creature* to usurp his place in the heart. The time of our ignorance, he mercifully winked at; but, now he has shown us what is right, it behooves us to be upon our guard. Oh! that he may so display the power of his grace, that the bonds and shackles which detain our souls might be broken! He can, he will do it, if we wait and pray.

I now can judge by my own feelings, how much you must have suffered during my long stay in London, especially sick and confined as you were, and anxious for the outcome of my journey. I never pitied you, as I ought, until now. For, though I likewise longed every day and every hour to see you, I had many things to divert my attention, and alleviate the feelings of absence. But, at present, I am as you were then, at home and alone. But, as I know, let who will have your *company*—I have your *heart*, I can make a good shift for a time.

How are ____? Do they love like us? No, they cannot yet. For love at first is a child, and grows stronger by age. I wish them happy; more happy than this world can make them.

Olney, August 5.

I feel your head-ache at this distance. Your frequent sicknesses are not pleasant; but they are God's mercies, for which we have reason to be thankful. Our *comforts* and *crosses* are all from the same hand. We have chastisement, only because we need it. I aim to leave you in the Lord's hands. Would we not forget ourselves, if he did not

seasonably remind us, what, where, and who we are? In the case of some of your dear friends, for whom you grieve, you may see how, in all probability, it would have been with you—if his eye of love had not been fixed upon you from your birth. He prepared his dispensations, to withdraw you gradually from that life of vanity and wastefulness to which you would otherwise have been enslaved all your days. And he has been gently dealing with your heart for several years past; leading you, if slowly, yet, I hope surely, nearer to himself. How much of his ways, how many of his people has he shown you! And he has given you a heart to love them, and reconciled you to things to which you were once as little inclined as those whom you now pity.

If I consider the endearing union he has cemented between us, with all its effects, only in a temporal view, I prefer it to all the treasures, pleasures, and honors, this world can afford; so that I would not exchange the joy I feel in the thought that you are mine, to be monarch of the whole earth. But, surely, it is much more valuable, considered as the means by which the Lord designed to unite us both to himself.

Olney, September 12. **1766.**

I pray God to bless to you the ordinances and fellowship which you are favored with in London, that you may go into Kent filled with the spirit of truth and love. When you are there, I hope you will make good use of the Bible, and throne of grace, to preserve you from being infected by the spirit of the world. Ah! what a poor vain thing is the world! We have both found it so at times, (though we once loved it,) and shall find it so again. But may the Lord keep us alive to a sense of its vanity, before more evil days return to extort the confession from our feelings! Sickness and pain, and a near prospect

of death, force upon the mind a conviction of the littleness and vanity of a worldly life. But there is a more pleasing way of learning this lesson, if we pay due attention to the Word of God, and pray for the light of his countenance. If he is pleased to make his face to shine upon us, all that the world can offer to bribe us, will appear insignificant and trivial as the sports of children.

He who has given us this desire, will, I trust, answer it, and unite our souls to himself forever. What a happy state we are in! We have peace with God, by Jesus Christ; liberty of access to the throne of grace; a saving interest in all God's promises; a sure Guide along the way; and a sure inheritance at our journey's end! These things were once hidden from us! We were so blinded by the god of this world—that we could look no farther than the present life! But, even then, the Lord looked upon us with an *eye of mercy*. He led us on, gradually, by a way which we knew not—to bring us into the paths of eternal peace. How wonderful has our history been, not mine only—but also yours! How often has he made himself known as your Deliverer and Physician, in raising you up from the gates of the grave! May we always remember his goodness in your last affliction! How did he sweeten the bitter cup; strengthen you with strength in your soul; enable you to pray for yourself; engage the hearts of many in prayer for you, and then speedily answer our prayers! Let us then excite each other to praise him!

I hope this little interval of absence will be useful, to make me more sensible of his goodness in still sparing you to me. I make but a poor shift without you now from day to day; but I am comforted by the hope of seeing you again shortly. Had you died by your late fever, I would not have had this relief! May we then live to him, and may every day be a preparation for the parting hour! Dark as this hour seems in the prospect, if we are established in the faith and hope of

our Lord, we shall find it supportable; and the separation will be short. We shall soon meet again, happy meeting! to part no more! to be forever with the Lord; to join in an eternal song to him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood! Then all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and we shall weep no more forever.

Olney, September 26.

I was with you in spirit this evening, and prayed that the Lord would give a blessing to what you might hear. To love and trust the Lord Jesus, is the great lesson we have to learn. We are slow scholars—but he can teach us effectually. Without him, the very best of this life is insipid, and his presence can make the worst things supportable. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith!"
Hebrews 12:2

I often think, and hope, you do not forget how graciously he supported and answered you in your late distress. There was a something that could, and did, bear you up under pain and anguish, and refresh your spirit when your bodily strength was almost worn out. This is an instance of what he can do; and should be a bond of gratitude upon both our souls. Your health is restored, and mine is preserved. May we devote our whole selves to him. He has great things to bestow; and, if we feel our need of his mercy, we are properly qualified to receive it. We are not called to buy—but to beg; to receive, without money and without price. By believing, all becomes freely and surely our own; not on the account of our prayers—but of his promise, blood, and mediation. And all he requires of us is to be humble and thankful; and the more he gives us, to desire still the more.

Oh, my dearest wife, I bless his name for bringing us together, and for sparing us to have some knowledge and communion in these great things! How many that were joined about the same time with us, or since, have been separated by death! How many are living in mutual disgust! And how many who seem happy, are, in reality, miserable, because they know nothing of the Lord, and of his goodness!

Olney, October 8.

I begin to count the hours to Friday. I am very desirous, though not anxious, to see you. The Lord has been good to me in your absence; the time has not seemed tedious, and all things, at home and abroad, as well as I could wish. I begin to write tonight, because I have devoted tomorrow to be spent, with as little interruption as possible, as a day of prayer, to entreat him to give us a happy and sanctified meeting, and that our future lives may be devoted to him. How great are our obligations for uniting us at first; for restoring us so often; or raising you up from so many illnesses; for preserving our affection; for overruling our concerns; for providing us friends; and, especially, for directing our hearts to seek his face. And still he is loading us with his benefits. Though we have not been without our trials—yet, all things considered, who has passed more gently through life thus far? And with whom, upon the face of the earth, would we now desire to change places? But with nothing has my heart been more affected, than with his goodness in and since your late illness. I am persuaded something passed then, that has left a relish and effect upon your mind ever since. Is it not so? Are you not determined to be his? Next to the salvation of my own soul, I have had no desire so often in my heart, so often in my lips, as to see you wholly given up to him. And, I

trust, He has been answering my prayers, my many thousand prayers, from year to year. What a bauble, in my eye, would the possession of the whole earth be—in comparison with our being fellow-heirs of the hope of eternal life!

I purpose to be in time to receive you at Newport. Perhaps I may wait at Mr. R____'s, as he lives opposite to the inn gate. But, when I hear the sound of the coach, I shall take my leave with very little ceremony. You never were more welcome to me in your whole life, than you will be this time.

Olney, April 5. **1768.**

I hope this will be the more welcome, for being unexpected. May it find you in health and peace, panting after communion with God!

I think of you all day; and, though I do not seem quite so much at a loss when you are away from me, as I have sometimes formerly been; I am sure it is not because I love you less. The Lord has given us a sufficiency of mutual affection, which has been strengthened by a long series of endearments and kind offices, and by a near participation in the comforts and trials of life. And now it should be our great concern and prayer, that our love may not be inordinate, or irregular; nor interfere with what we owe to the great Lover of our souls. The apostle's question, "Was Paul crucified for you?" suggests a thought which disparages all creature regard, as the splendor of the noon-day sun overpowers the twinkling of the stars.

May the Lord open your ears and your heart, that you may receive profit where you are. Do not give place to unbelief. Jesus is both an able and a willing Savior. Pray for a tender conscience, and a

dependent spirit. Watch against the motions of *SELF*; they are subtle and various. Let no engagements prevent you from reserving seasons of retirement for prayer, and reading the Scriptures. The best company, the best public ordinances, will not compensate for the neglect of these. At the same time, guard against a spirit of bondage; nor fetter your mind by too many rules and resolves. It is our privilege to serve the Lord with cheerfulness; not considering him as a hard Master—but as a tender Father, who knows and pities our weakness; who is ready to pardon our mistakes, and to teach us to do better. He accepts us, freely and graciously, when we present ourselves before him, in the name of Jesus, his beloved Son.

Martham, April 15.

We reached this place today, about noon. I am very well, only much fatigued. The man you saw step into the coach, was drunk all the way to Colchester, (where we left him.) He swore, for a time, almost in every sentence. As soon as I could find a favorable opening, I spoke to him. He was civil, and promised to swear no more. But, poor man! He might as well have promised not to breathe. However, he was tolerably quiet afterwards.

My heart loves you, my dearest, and many a prayer I breathe out for you; which, indeed, is almost the only kind of prayer I have found time or room for since I left London. But I hope to be recruited and composed soon. I am likely to have business enough in hand next week. At present, I am dry and empty; but the *fountain* from whence I have been often supplied, is still full and flowing. Excuse a short letter. If it was not to you, I could not write at all.

Olney, May 1.

The Lord brought me home in safety last night. I believe our dear people are truly glad to see me; and I am sure I rejoice to be with them again. I preached this morning from 2 Samuel 7:24, "You established Your people Israel Your own people forever, and You, Lord, have become their God". I wish my dearest, a growing experience of the subject. No honor can be compared to that of being the Lord's people; no privilege like that of having him for our God.

I must not write much, for it is almost time to find a *text* for the afternoon, which I have not yet done. I went this morning into the pulpit, as having only a small piece of bread to set before the multitude. But, through mercy, it multiplied in the distribution, and, I hope, there was a comfortable meal for those who were present, and some fragments left that will not be lost.

It is not choice—but necessity, that makes me sometimes live, as we say, *from hand to mouth*. While my head is full of new people and places, I cannot do otherwise. And I have reason to be thankful that my hopes are seldom disappointed upon such occasions; though I know not when I have been so straitened and embarrassed, as I was the other night at the Lock. I rather wonder that this happens so seldom, than that it happens at all. How justly might the Lord take his word of truth out of my unworthy mouth! Perhaps he saw it good for me, that *Mr. Self* should have his pride cut rather there, than in another place; and I hope there is that in me, which is as willing to appear to a disadvantage (if it must be so) at the Lock as at Olney: though, to be sure, flesh and blood are pleased to be thought *somebody*, when among dear friends or fine folks.

Olney, May 3.

I did not promise to write today—but my heart is always ready, and opportunity always welcome. I am in good health, and glad to be again retired from yonder noisy city.

I wrote yesterday to Mr. A____, and, in my evening walk, my thoughts and prayers turned much upon the affecting stroke he has received. Indeed, it has been seldom out of my mind since I came home. Besides my concern for his loss and my own, (there is no cause to mourn for her,) I consider it as a loud speaking lesson to you and I. How often has she been raised up from the brink of the grave, in answer to prayer; and yet, now, suddenly and unexpectedly dead! We likewise have been long preserved, and often restored to each other. But a time will come when every *gourd* will wither, every *cistern* be broken. Let us pray for a waiting, resigned, and dependent fame of spirit; for ability to commit ourselves, and our all, into the merciful hands of Him who cares for us; and that, while we are spared, we may walk together, as help-meets and fellow-heirs of eternal life. We shall not be parted a moment sooner, for living in daily expectation of our appointed change; but the thought may be a happy means of composing our minds, and of preventing us from being too much engrossed, either by the *sweets* or the *bitters* of this transitory life!

Many occasions of care and perplexity, that are apt to waste our time and wound our peace, would be avoided, could we duly consider how soon we shall be done with all these things. May you, may I, be more rooted and grounded in the truth, more humbled and comforted, more filled with that love, joy, and unspeakable peace, which the Gospel reveals, and for which the promises of God warrant us to pray. Be not discouraged, because you have nothing of your own. The

empty bucket is put into the well, and, because it is empty, the Lord has opened wells of salvation for us, and has promised that we shall not seek his face in vain.

I long to have you at home with me; for, though I am, in a sense, very comfortable, the house looks unfurnished without you, and I miss you in every room. How then must the Moor-side look to our dear friend! Every step he takes, every person he meets, must remind him of his loss! But I trust the Lord is, and will be, his support. May his grace be with us! Then we shall be equal to everything that can possibly befall us, and need not be afraid of evil tidings.

Olney, May 5.

Your last dear letter found me in peace, and, I hope, did me good. It quickened my prayers and praises on your behalf. I never attempt to pray without putting up some petitions for your spiritual welfare, nor without aiming, at least, to express my sense of gratitude to the Lord for joining our hands and hearts. Your affection, and its consequences, are continually upon my mind, and I feel you in almost every thought. I am willing to hope that I am, in some degree, freed from that *idolatrous regard* which made me place you too long in a light, for which I deserved to forfeit you every day. But I am sure my love has suffered no abatement; yes, I am sure it has increased, from year to year, though I endeavor to hold you more in subordination to Him to whom I owe you, and by whose blessing alone it is that we have found comfort in each other. I trust the Lord had a further design than our accommodation in the present life, in bringing us together; even that we might be joint witnesses and partakers of his grace, and fellow-heirs of his salvation. Our earthly connection must cease; but an eternal union in happiness is an

important prospect indeed! Everything else, however valuable in its place, sinks into *nothing* upon the comparison.

If youth, and health, and life, could be prolonged for a thousand years, and every moment of that space be filled up with the greatest satisfaction we can conceive, this seemingly long period must at last terminate; and, when once past, it would appear short and inconsiderable, as the eighteen years we have already spent together do at present. But, if we are united in the faith and hope of the Gospel, we shall never part. Even that separation which must take place, (so painful at times to think of,) will not deserve the name of *parting*. It will be but like the one coming down first from London, and the other safely following in a few days. And, however flesh and blood may startle at the apprehension, the case of Mr. A____, and many others, sufficiently prove the Lord's faithfulness to his promise, and that he can support those who trust him in the most trying circumstances.

Let it, therefore, be our chief concern to attain a good hope that we are his, and he is ours, and then we may cheerfully commit the rest to him. He can forgive sin, impart grace, subdue corruption, silence unbelief, make us strong out of weakness, and do more than we can either ask or think. And what he does, he does freely, without money and without price. He does not require us to help ourselves, before we apply to him—but to come to him for help, and we shall not come in vain. Fight, therefore, my dearest, against unbelief, and the Lord will give you the victory. Tell him, what I am sure you are convinced of, that you have nothing, deserve nothing, can do nothing; but that you have heard he is mighty to save, and has promised, that none who apply to him shall ever be cast out. None ever did miscarry in this way. If they did, his truth and faithfulness must miscarry with them.

Olney, May 15.

I hope your visit in Kent, will, upon a review, be made profitable to yourself. You will admire the Lord's goodness in *choosing* you (as one of a thousand) to the knowledge of his truth, when you might (according to the views with which you first entered upon life) have been *still swimming down the stream of vanity and folly with the thoughtless multitude!* How little did either of us think, in those early days when I first knew you, to what the Lord designed to lead us! Do not you see, and say, He has done great things? How often has he raised you from the gates of death? With what *mercies* and *gentleness* has he followed you? What a great advantage has he afforded you, in so large an acquaintance and intimacy with those who fear and love him?

Shall the *enemy* urge you to draw discouragements from these multiplied instances of the Lord's goodness? I hope not. Do not give way to unbelief. Do not indulge perplexing thoughts of the secret counsels of God. What is revealed in the Scripture calls for our attention; and there it is written, as with a sun-beam, "Those who seek—shall find." It is true, when we are seeking, he often exercises our patience; but he has told us beforehand to expect it, and has given us encouragement, by parables, examples, and promises—to continue praying, and not to faint. Though he tarries, wait for him. Though he may seem to treat you like the woman of Canaan for a time—yet he is full of compassion and mercy. The humble spirit, the principle of faith, the heart-felt repentance, and every other gracious disposition to which the promises are made, are all his gifts, which he bestows freely on the unworthy.

Since you know that you are a sinner, and that he is the only Savior, what should prevent your comfort? Had he bid you do some *great* thing, you would, at least, have attempted it. If a pilgrimage to some distant place was the appointed mean of salvation, would you be content to sit at home and perish? How much rather then should you keep close to the throne of grace, when he has only said, "Ask—and you shall receive!"

When we first joined hands, neither you nor I knew much of the things pertaining to our eternal peace. But, as soon as the Lord began to show me a little of the way, how much, from that time to this, you have been upon my heart, is only known to him; and I trust he has answered, and is still answering, my prayers. What passed in your last illness I shall never forget. I think, had he then taken you from me, I could have *rejoiced* in the midst of my grief. From that period I have had a hope of more value to me than the possession of the earth, that he has taken a sure hold of your heart, and that he will not cease to draw you nearer and nearer to himself. Continue to pray, and watch over your spirit. Keep always in mind that you are a *sinner*, and Jesus is a Savior of sinners. Such thoughts frequently recurred to, are means by which the Lord composes and sanctifies the frame of our tempers, and the strain of our conversation. Accept this little homily in good part, and may a blessing attend you in the perusal.

Olney, May 18. **1769.**

I preached yesterday at Collingtree. The church was full. Returned in safety before nine in the evening.

The case of those who depart from the gospel way, after they seem to have chosen it, is lamentable. Thus it might have been with us; but this I trust, shall not be. The Lord has made known to us His name of *love*, and has shown us, what we would never have seen, had it been his pleasure to damn us. Let us live under abiding views of the all-sufficiency of Jesus the Savior, and we may rejoice in hope.

The *peace of God* which passes understanding, is seldom attained—but through a course of *conflict*. God gave Canaan to Israel by *promise*, and put them in *possession* of it by the power of his own arm—yet they must *fight for every inch of ground*. The desire, and the accomplishment, are equally of grace; yet, in the use of means, and with our eye to him, we must strive. Our poor exertions would be in vain, if he did not require them; but now they are needful, and shall be successful. The *rod of Moses*, the instrument of performing so many miracles, was no better than common stick, until the appointment of God gave it a wonderful virtue. Had Moses then refused, or neglected, to use it—he could have done nothing. Now the means of grace, especially prayer, may be compared to the rod of Moses. If we go on, with this rod in our hands; if we call upon God, meditate upon his promises, and plead them from day to day—he will make our way prosperous.

Olney, May 28.

The Lord has mercifully brought me home in peace. The fatigue of the journey, and the excessive heat on Tuesday, occasioned a slight fever, which went off that evening, and returned yesterday, as I was riding my horse at Bicester. However, I rode, not unpleasantly, to Buckingham; and there, for fear of overdoing, we took a carriage to Stratford, where Mrs. U___ kindly met us, and brought us home. I

preached without pain on Sunday. The fever is now gone, my appetite returned, and I am well. My slight illness was rather a balk and hindrance with respect to my friends at Oxford and Sutton. But, taking all things together, I never had a more comfortable journey. I felt such a peace and composure in considering myself and all my concerns in the hand of the Lord, as I cannot describe, and can seldom attain when in health. I had not one impatient or anxious thought, not even about you; and seemed quite willing, if the Lord had so pleased, to have *died* upon the road. I was yesterday, if ever in my life, as a *weaned child*. I hope this account of my sickness will not hurry you home sooner than you intended, for I am quite recovered.

Olney, May 30.

My thoughts will accompany you to Wimbledon today. Give my affectionate respects to our dear friends, and tell them, I would have had much pleasure in being of the party. Besides the chief inducement of their company, I am fond of the place, and should promise myself some pleasant hours in the walks. But I know neither *places* nor *company* can communicate any real good—unless the Lord be present; and, when he is near—any place, and even solitude itself, is agreeable. It is my mercy to find that in Olney, which contents and satisfies me.

I have such a group of kind inquirers every morning, that I am much interrupted in writing. It is pleasing to be beloved, and doubly pleasing to me to know that the *favor* the Lord has given me here is chiefly on account of the Gospel which I preach. The affection that is built upon this foundation will endure forever, and will flourish when every other tie shall cease; and thus, I trust, it is between my dearest wife and I. How closely has the Lord united us, by marriage, by

affection, by the strongest and most endearing obligations! But all these respect the *present* life, and must terminate with it. But I trust there is a still nearer relation between us, in the Lord and in his truth—which shall exist to eternity. In the mean time, may he give us to know more of the power and comfort of it, while we walk together here below; that we may rejoice in the knowledge of what he has done already, and in the prospect of what he has provided for us hereafter. *Believe*, my dearest, and you shall be established. *Pray*, and your faith shall be confirmed. Resist the devil with the sword of the Spirit, the good Word of God—and he shall flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. I know your discouragements; but they are not peculiar to yourself. Surely, he has appeared for you in times past, and I cannot doubt but he will come again.

I am glad to think the time of your return draws near. I miss you every day and hour; yet I cannot say that time is burdensome, or that I am very dull, or unked, as they call it here, in your absence; as the people think I must be. Several of them almost threatened to write on Sunday, to tell you how ill I was, and to beg you to return immediately; but their fears magnified the case. They long to see you, however, for your own sake, and give the most simple and affecting proofs that they love you dearly.

Olney, May 20. 1770.

I have had a morning walk, in which I was favored with some liberty; at such seasons you are always remembered. While I would praise God that we have been so long and so comfortably spared to each other, I must not forget that an hour of separation *must* come, and that the time is uncertain. It must be so; and it is well. *Surely we*

would not wish to live always in this poor world! Oh! for a clearer view of our interest in the love and all-sufficiency of the Savior; that we may stay our souls upon him, and possess a stable, unshaken peace! It is He who has given us a desire to seek him, because He has purposed to be found by us, Jer. 31:3. And, though our desires are too faint, and disproportionate to the greatness of their object—he will not despise the *day of small things*, nor quench the *smoking flax*.

I feel your absence, and long for your return; but I am not disconsolate. It was otherwise with me once. I can remember when the sun seemed to shine in vain, and the whole creation appeared as a blank—if you were away from me. Not that I love you less, as the fellowship of many successive years has endeared you more and more to my heart. But I hope the Lord has weakened that *idolatrous disposition*, for which I have so often deserved to lose you. I am astonished at his patience and forbearance, that, when I presumptuously gave you that place in my heart which was only due to Him—He did not tear my idol from me! To what dangers has my ill-conducted regard often exposed you! But he is God and not man. I hope it is now my desire to hold nothing in competition with Him, and to entrust my all to His keeping and disposal. If we hold each other in a proper submission and subordination to Him, He will bless us, and make us mutually comforts and helpmates. He will sanctify the *bitters* of life, and give the *sweets* a double sweetness. His blessing is the one thing needful; without it, there is neither *security* for what we possess, nor true *satisfaction* in the possession. We have no good in or of ourselves, or which we can impart to another. We may *pity*—but we cannot *relieve* each other when in trouble. We cannot remove one pain, or give one moment's peace of mind—to those whom we best love.

Many prayers are, and will be, put up for you and Mrs. U____ while you are away. It is this which endears Olney to me—the Lord has a praying people here, and they pray for us. To be interested in the simple, affectionate, and earnest prayers of such a people, is a privilege of more value than the wealth of kings! In answer to their prayers, the Lord has placed a *hedge* about all our concerns, blessed our going out and coming in, and preserved us and ours in health, when sickness or death have been in almost every house around us. And, doubtless, I am much indebted to their prayers, that, with such a heart as mine, and such a frame of spirit as I frequently mourn under—I am still favored with some liberty, acceptance, and usefulness in my ministry.

London, November 19, 1771.

We came safely to town about noon. I have just parted with my dear and honored friend, with whom the hours of the journey passed very pleasantly. I am wondering at myself, and at everybody about me. It seems strange to think of being so suddenly whirled away from you. So many preaching and other engagements are provided for me, that I believe I cannot return before Saturday. I hope the Lord will be with you, and that you will be led earnestly to seek His blessing for me and for yourself. I have breathed out many a prayer for you since I saw you, and hope to do so while I can breathe at all. May he give us to grow daily in the knowledge of his grace, and to rejoice in the views of his excellency, and of our interest in Him as our God and Savior. This is the one thing, and the only thing which is promised absolutely, and without a possibility of failure, to those who desire it. Everything else is vain, uncertain, and changeable. But he will surely, though gradually, make himself known to the heart that seeks Him.

I have been with Mrs. C****, she is sorely afflicted—but appears to be in a humble, dependent frame. From how many heart-rending distresses by which *others* are suffering, has the good providence of God preserved *us!* May he make us thankful for the exemption, and teach us to bear our *smaller crosses* with a befitting submission to his will!

Clapham, July 2, 1772.

If it was not to my dearest wife, I could not write so soon after dinner. But, though my *belly* is full, and my *head* empty, I must tell you that I had very quiet agreeable company in the coach, and a pleasant ride to Deptford; where I mounted a horse dear Mr. T____ had sent for me, which said horse brought me safely hither. Thus the Lord graciously preserves me from place to place.

I am always a little awkward without you, and every room where you are not present, looks unfurnished. It is not a humble *servant* that says this—but a *husband*—and he says it, not in what is called the honey-moon—but in the twenty-third year after marriage. Nor do I speak it to my own praise—but to the praise of our good Lord, who, by his blessing, has endeared us to each other. Fickleness and vanity are inherent in our fallen nature; and, if left to ourselves, we might have been indifferent, weary, and disgusted with each other long ago. But He has united our hearts; and, I trust, the union shall exist to eternity. May we possess, while here, the peace which passes understanding, and live under the abiding expectation of *perfect happiness* hereafter!

Olney, July 9.

I have not much news to tell you. I have been to see Mrs. R____. You remember how near death she was, by falling into the water, about two weeks ago. She was since persuaded to take a one-horse coach. They were hardly half a mile from the house, when the horse suddenly fell, upon a smooth road, and by the shock—was thrown out of the coach, over the wheel. You will not wonder that she was much hurt and bruised, if you consider her weight. No bones were broken; but the fall, in addition to her previous illness, has brought her very low, and I think she cannot continue long. What thanks do we owe to the Lord, for his merciful care of *us* in all our journeys, when *others* meet with such disasters close to their own home!

The state of some of our family, where you are, is much upon my mind. I hope I have engaged many to pray for them. May the Lord grant that all you see, hear, and feel, where you are, may draw your heart still nearer to himself! What is all below—but vanity and vexation? There is no solid comfort, no abiding peace—but what we derive from God. Once we knew nothing of this. But the Lord directed our path in life, in subservience to the designs of his grace. How few of those with whom you were acquainted in your early years, have any right knowledge of *God*—or of *themselves*. We ourselves set out upon this dreadful plan; and, if mercy had not stopped us, we would have gone on, until we had perished with a lie in our own right hands!

Do, my dearest, take encouragement from what the Lord has done, to believe that he will do still more for you. Do not think that he has opened your eyes, and taught you that your help is in Him alone, only to disappoint you. The enemy would keep you from seeking him diligently and constantly, and would persuade you that you get little

or no good from all your attempts; but believe him not. Rather believe the Word of promise, that, though he may seem to delay, he will not, he cannot, deny those who persevere in asking in the name of Jesus.

How little do I know of my own heart! While I thought myself sure of a letter, I vainly supposed I could be easy, though I should not receive one. But, when the post arrived, and brought no letter from you, my spirits sunk in a minute; and, I fear, I shall be too impatient in wishing for Friday. Surely, my dear wife knows me too well to think that, after a whole week's absence, I should not be longing to hear from her. If you inadvertently neglected to write, I must gently blame you; it ought, indeed, to be very gently, as it is the first fault of the kind I can charge you with, since our happy marriage. I rather think you have written—but by some mistake the letter has miscarried; for I am willing to hope you are well. I am quite disconcerted. But, if I receive one by the next post, you need be in no pain for me, for that will set all to rights. I have been to bury a corpse at Weston this evening. I promised myself a pleasant walk—but the want of a letter spoiled it. I would gladly have directed my thoughts to subjects of more importance—but I could not. Alas! I am a poor creature. Pray, my dearest, write often; for, next to your company, I prize your letters above anything, merely temporal, that this earth can afford.

Olney, July 12.

I waited about the street yesterday. At half-past four the horn sounded, and my heart went pit-a-pat. But I soon saw Molly pass the window, and by her looks and her speed, I guessed she had a letter. I snatched it from her and read it, and was presently well.

My heart was melted the other day, when I found the little book in your drawer, in which you had begun to set down such texts of Scripture as had more particularly engaged your notice, and especially when I read the two pages of prayer with which you had prefaced them; a prayer agreeable to the promises of God, and, I trust, dictated to you by his Holy Spirit. My soul gave a hearty Amen to every petition. I am sorry that anything prevented you from proceeding in what was so well begun; but I hope you will resume it when you return. The blessings of the Gospel are open to you. Could you steadily strive against the hindrances and discouragements thrown in your way, and simply and patiently abide in the use of the means of grace, without giving way to vain reasoning, you would soon experience a growth in peace and comfort. To *patient faith*—the prize is sure. May the Lord help you thus to wait; and may he give us more freedom to converse for our mutual encouragement.

I am a strange, inconsistent creature in this respect, as in many others. Next to the salvation of my own soul, there is nothing which lies so near my heart as your spiritual welfare; and yet I am often tongue-tied, and can speak more readily to anybody than to you. Let us mutually endeavor to break through every restraint, that we may be *helpmates* in the best sense of the word. I preached this morning from Deut. 32:10. The passage applies to all the Lord's people, "He found them in a waste howling wilderness." How emphatically does it apply to me? He redeemed me from slavery in Africa, and has selected me as a pattern of his grace to the chief of sinners! What a mercy to me! I trust to you also. For he appointed us for each other from the first, and his hand brought us together, and into our present situation, by a train of miracles.

London, November 16, 1773.

Past three o'clock on this cloudy morning. I hope my dearest is now in a sweet sleep. When I am done writing, I shall proceed to the coach, which sets off exactly at four. Please do not fear my being robbed or hurt in the dark. For I expect a *guard* will go with me— One to whom "the darkness and the light are both alike." I went through a very long dark lane, on Wednesday evening, with dear Mr. Th____; but no one disturbed us, for the Lord was our Preserver.

You may be sure that my heart is continually with you. I seldom pass many minutes without darting a prayer upwards in your behalf. The knowledge of your *affection* affords me the greatest pleasure I can receive or desire, of a temporal kind. But your *apprehensions* on my account, when I am called from you for a season, give me pain. I wish we could both more simply entrust each other, without anxiety, to the Lord's goodness and care. Surely, he delights in our prosperity, or else why have we been spared so long? or how have we been so mercifully supported, so seasonably relieved, and enriched with so many blessings, from year to year? May all that we experience be sanctified, to humble us, and to increase our dependence upon Him, who is always near and willing to help us.

I must go. I carry with me from place to place a heart full of an affectionate and grateful sense of your love, and of the innumerable and invaluable mercies and comforts the Lord has given me in the relation I stand to you.

Olney, April 27, 1774.

I sympathize with you; I already feel the concern which you will shortly feel, when you say farewell to your sister and your family. Methinks, if I could prevent it, you would not have a moment's uneasiness, pain, or trial, from the beginning to the end of the year. But how could you then be a partaker of that good which the Lord bestows upon his people through the *medium of afflictions*? I hope he will give you an entire resignation to his will; and that the grief you and your sister will feel at parting, will be compensated by a cheerful hope of meeting again, perhaps more than once, in this life; but, if not here, in the better and eternal world. And, when you drop a tear at leaving your father, sister, aunt, and friends, remember that you are coming to a *husband* who loves you better than it is possible any or all other friends can. You will be more welcome to me on your return, than on the happy day which first made you mine. How will my *eyes* delight to see you, my *ears* to hear you speak, and my *arms* to enfold you!

My text tonight is Psalm 36:7-8. It is a full and gracious promise. The weak and defenseless shall be sheltered under the wings of the Almighty! How does the hen cover her brood with her wings! If her power was equal to her will, nothing could hurt them. The Lord our Savior makes use of this *picture* for your encouragement; and his *power*, like his *compassion*, is infinite. Again, the hungry soul shall be *satisfied* with fatness; not merely kept alive—but *feasted*, so that it shall thrive and flourish. Lastly, the miserable shall not only *taste*—but *drink* of pleasures; not a single *draught*, nor out of a vessel that will soon be empty—but from a river whose stream is perpetual, whose source is inexhaustible! The streams of this river—make glad the city of God upon earth. How much more abundantly will it flow in heaven! Here, then, is our encouragement. Creatures fail and change—but the Lord is always the same. And he gives the water of

life freely, without money and without price. He invites all who hear, and receives all who come.

The clock is striking twelve, therefore I wish you a good night. May the angels of the Lord, yes, the *Lord of angels* himself, watch over your bed and your sleeping hours. My chamber looks rather solitary at present; yet, through mercy, I sleep soundly.

Olney, April 17.

I thank you for your letter. I do not complain of its brevity. A single line to inform me of your safe arrival, would have gladdened my heart, and, I trust, have excited my gratitude to the Lord our Preserver. Not that I think you in more real danger upon the road than when at home; for a thousand unthought-of dangers are always near us, and our own shortsighted care is insufficient to preserve ourselves, or each other, for a single moment! Yet my foolish mind is prone to be more solicitous about you when you are out of my sight. I am conscious of many things which make me wonder at the Lord's goodness in sparing you to me so long; and that you have not been oftener, or more heavily, afflicted for my sake. But his thoughts are high above mine, as the heavens are higher than the earth. And it is our mercy that we are not under the *law*—but under *grace*.

I rose from my knees to take my pen in hand, and shall daily pray for you all. I trust the Lord has given your sister that knowledge of himself which will make her situation in Scotland agreeable. The earth is the Lord's; and his servants, wherever their lot is cast, have his throne of grace always near them. I know not how she may fare there in point of ordinances. However, if the Lord is pleased to dwell in her heart and in her house, he can make up every defect. His Providence, undoubtedly, leads her there; and we can be nowhere better than in the path of duty. His blessing upon *secret prayer* and

the reading' of his *Word* will keep her soul alive, though the public preaching should not be quite to her wish.

Though I miss you continually, I am neither lonely nor dull. I hope the Lord will give me a heart to wait upon him, and then I shall do well enough until you are restored to me. I need not wish the time away: it flies amazingly fast, and, alas! too poorly improved. These little separations should engage us to seek his blessing, that we may be prepared for the hour (which must come) when one of us must have the trial of living a while without the other. The Lord, who appoints and times all things wisely and well—He only knows which of us will be reserved for this painful exercise. But I rely on his all-sufficiency and faithfulness to make our strength equal to our day. It will require a power above our own to support us under either part of the alternative, whether we are called to leave or to resign. But He who so wonderfully brought us together, and has so mercifully spared us hitherto, can *sweeten* what would otherwise be most *bitter* to the flesh. If he is pleased to shine upon us, all will be well. His presence can supply the loss of the most endeared creature-comforts, as a candle may be easily spared when the sun is seen.

Olney, April 23.

Yesterday I went to see Mr. C____. I found him in much distress, and his wife in more. The the coming of the coroner prevented my stay. The burial was last night. The church-yard was full of people; but, as the hour was late, and the parents broken-hearted, I did not say much at the grave. The lad was in his fourteenth year; was just come home from school; and asked to eat—but, before he ate, went with the cart, which was going for hay. His father was cutting the hay at a small distance, and, seeing the boy get up upon the shafts, he called

to him—but was either not heard or not regarded. Another son drove the cart; the horse suddenly took fright, and the field being full of hillocks, the cart was soon overturned. The boy fell under the wheel, and was instantly killed. He neither spoke nor stirred. Mr. C____ saw all that passed, and was then forced to be the mournful messenger of the news to his wife. It seems, she was wrapped up (as we say) in her children. I was told that, when she heard of the event, she flew out of the house, and ran a considerable way she knew not where, before she could be stopped. She had afterwards a long succession of fits, and they feared she would have lost her senses. But, when I saw her, she was more composed. She seems to be not without a sense of religion; she had been long a hearer in the lower meeting—but of late has come more to my church.

It is a heavy trial; but the Lord can cause *good* fruits to grow from a *bitter* root. How much praise do we owe him for that protection which has covered us, as with a shield, in all our journeys, as well as at home! I hope soon to have a call to thank him, for conducting you safely into Kent.

I have been to see Mrs. C____ again. It is a pleasant retired walk to their house; but it was not pleasant to me this time. My heart, alas! was dry as a wood-chip, unsettled as a weathercock. However, I could and did pray for them. I hope she is a good woman. She told me, she had often wished that some occasion might bring me to their house. But neither she nor her husband could take courage (such a formidable animal, it seems, am I) to ask me. She is now troubled for having wished I might come. But I hope the stroke may prove a blessing to them both.

Olney, April 25.

I thank God I continue in good health, and well enough in spirits. But the frame of my mind is cold, wandering, and unpleasant. For the most part, when you have been abroad, I have been favored with more composure, and the hours have passed more agreeably and profitably, than at present. But you need not wish yourself at home merely upon this account. For the Lord alone can remove the complaint of a dull, dissipated frame. Your tenderness can do much for me—but you cannot relieve me in this case. But, though I am not as I wish to be, I am not unhappy.

My text tonight, when I lay my head upon my pillow, will be Psalm 34:15. Who are the righteous, upon whom the eye of the Lord is fixed, and to whose cry his ear is open? Not the self-righteous, but the helpless, unworthy sinners, who, without any plea but the word of promise, put their trust in the name of Jesus. These are accounted righteous for the Savior's sake. They are accepted in the Beloved; and, because they ask in his name, their prayer is heard. Why should not we, my dearest, open our mouths wide, and expect great things, when we have such an Advocate? Do you say, How shall I know that He is mine? I answer, He is an advocate for all who will commit their cause to Him. They are not described by *name*—but by *character*; as sinners who have no hope in themselves, are not willing to perish, and therefore, hearing that he is able and willing to save to the uttermost, venture upon his word, cast themselves at his feet, and commit their all into his hands. Have not I, and have not you, such thoughts of ourselves, and of Jesus the Savior? Wait then for Him, give not way to unbelief. He can do all that He says, and He says no more than He means to perform.

Olney, April 30.

I feel for you every day while you are at Chatham; but I hope and pray the Lord will sanctify all your trials to your profit. If it depended upon me, you would have nothing to grieve you for a moment; but I am glad our concerns are in his wise and gracious hands, who appoints us a mixture of afflictions and trials, not because he takes pleasure in giving us pain, (our many comforts afford sufficient proofs of his goodness,) but because he sees that troubles are often better for us, than the continual enjoyment of our own wishes.

I am concerned to find you so very accessible to fears and alarms upon my account. Indeed I would not exchange the affection which gives rise to them, for crowns and kingdoms. But why should you make yourself unhappy? Why distrust the good hand of God, which has so long preserved us? Why should you take the course which, in the nature of thing, is most likely to bring upon you the evil which you fear? Do not you consider, that you yourself expose me to the greatest danger, by your sinful distrust of the Lord, and your over-much dependence upon a poor creature, who loves you, it is true, even as his own soul; but who, with the warmest desires of your happiness, is, in himself, quite unable to promote it; unable to procure you the smallest good, or to shield you from the greatest trouble. May it please God so to impress and fill your heart, that your supreme and undivided regard may be fixed upon Him who alone is worthy. Then we shall be happy in each other indeed, when all our thoughts and aims are properly subordinate to what we owe to Him. *If we loved Him with all our hearts, we would find it easy to trust him with all our concerns.* And then it would not greatly signify which of us went first to heaven, or by what means.

Let us, my dearest, pray for each other. Methinks we still wander in a wilderness, upon the very brink of a happy state, and yet cannot enter. How strange that we who read of such a Savior, who are

acquainted with such promises, (made to the most unworthy,) and are so fully convinced of the reality of spiritual blessings; how strange is it, that we should be thus alternately elevated or cast down by *mere trifles!* that we should sit, like Hagar, lamenting over an empty *vessel*, when the *fountain* of life runs so near us! Keep this to read to me, when it may come to *my turn* to be pinched with unbelief. Perhaps you will soon have occasion to say, *Physician, heal yourself!*

I have had a pleasant walk this evening, and was enabled to pray for you, that you may gain a blessing upon all your relocation, and be restored to me in peace. My pillow-text tonight will be in Psalm 39:1-13. Suppose I take Psalm 39:8. "Deliver me from *all* my transgressions, make me not the reproach of the foolish." How rich is the grace that has provided a ground for so great a petition, as is expressed in the first clause! What arithmetic can compute the whole that is included in the word *all!* One transgression would be sufficient to sink the soul into ruin. But the blood of Jesus Christ frees those who believe in him from the guilt of all. And his Spirit is sufficient to set us at liberty from the power of all sin, so that not one shall have dominion over us. Yet the supply of this Spirit is to be sought by earnest prayer; otherwise, notwithstanding what we know, and what we have received, we are liable to take such steps as would make us the reproach of the foolish.

Whenever you return, you will be welcome to me, as gold to the miser. But I hope to support the interval without being burdened. My days are filled up with employment, and at night I sleep soundly; so that no part of my time hangs heavy upon my hands.

Olney, May 2.

Methinks I see you just now. Your spirits sink a little, because you are taking leave of your sister and friends. I allow you to drop a tear or two. But I hope tomorrow, and before you have traveled many miles, you will resume your cheerfulness, and leave them and yourself in the hand of the Lord without anxiety. He fitted your sister for the post he has assigned her, and, I trust, he will not only bless her—but make her a blessing to many around her. I sometimes think, that the child's lameness may give such a different turn to his future life, may prevent so many things that might otherwise have happened, and give occasion to so many things which otherwise would not have happened, that, in the way of means, it may have a near connection with the salvation of his soul. It is good to trust the Lord, and leave the management of all to Him. He is wise. He sees to the end of our path. We, poor short-sighted creatures, cannot see an inch before us, and if left to our own choice, would embroil ourselves in troubles by the very steps we would take to prevent them.

I shall be glad to hear you are at London, because you will then be thirty miles nearer to me. But I remember when there were not only *hills*—but *oceans* between us. Then the Lord brought us together in safety. It seems to me now, almost as if we had been separated for the time of an African voyage. But I wait with patience your summons to meet you at Newport. I would rather see you—than all that the world accounts magnificent. I had rather hear you speak—than hear all Handel's music. I would rather call you mine—than possess wagon-loads of gold. Some people would deem this the language of folly; but it is the language of *love* and of *truth*.

It grows late. The maids are gone to bed, and I shall soon retire to mine. It is rather lonely at present; but, I thank God, I am a stranger to the remotest wish that it were lawful to me to have any companion but yourself. Since the Lord gave me the desire of my heart in my

dearest wife, the rest of the gender are no more to me than the weeds in the garden. Oh, what a mercy is it, that I can say this! I speak it not to my own praise—but to the praise of the Lord. I have a vile heart, capable of any and every evil; and, in myself, am as prone to change as a weathercock. But, with respect to you, he has been pleased to keep me fixed, as the north-pole, without one minute's variation for twenty-four years, three months, and one day; and I humbly trust that he will thus keep me to the end of my life.

Olney, May 4.

The wind blows hard at N____ so that I suppose your brother and sister are embarked. If they are, I do not mean to be very uneasy for them; and I hope you will not. The God of the dry land—is God of the sea likewise. He is as near us in a *storm* as in a *calm*; and we need his protection no less in a *calm* than in a *storm*. May the Lord give to them and to us his grace; that, looking to him, we may be comforted under all separations and changes, by an assured hope of meeting, to unspeakable advantage, in a better world! We are all quickly lessening the distance to our everlasting home! Our voyage through this life will sometimes be disrupted by troublous storms—but the Lord Jesus is our infallible, almighty Pilot. The winds and the seas obey Him! None ever miscarried under His care—He takes charge of all who entrust themselves to Him. Let us make His good Word our compass to direct our hearts to the haven, to the heaven, where we desire to be!

I need not wish time away; it flies with an amazing swiftness, even in your absence. But I hope it will be better with me when you return. I am not uncomfortable—but I am a little unsettled. I can do more business in two days when you are at home, than in three when you

are abroad. For, though I sit many an hour in my study without seeing you—yet to know that you are in, or about the house, and that I can see you when I please, gives a sort of composure to my mind: so that I must say your company is a hindrance to me upon the whole; though occasionally my attention to you might make me leave something undone which I ought to have done. In short, whether with you or without you, I am a poor creature, and see much to be ashamed of every day, and in every circumstance. However, I have great reason to bless God that I ever saw you.

Olney, May 9.

I am very glad you heard and approved Mr. ____ and especially that you mean to call upon him. I hope you will pray and strive against those prejudices which your affection for me, and your jealousy lest any person should not look upon me with the same partiality which you do, have sometimes occasioned. These thoughts have been the greatest hurt to your spirit, and the greatest hindrance to your comfortable progress, of anything that I know; and have sometimes given me no small uneasiness. I cannot wish you to *love* me less—but I often wish you could be less *anxious* about me. Pray for me, that I may be simple, upright, and diligent, in my walk and work—and then you may cheerfully leave my concerns with the Lord, and may be assured that he will give me as much acceptance and favor as is good for me. Be upon your guard against making yourself, and of course me, uneasy about *things which neither of us can help or alter*. Temptations follow tempers; and Satan is always subtle and busy in his attempts to break our peace, and divert our thoughts from the main object. Though your company is my dearest and most valued earthly comfort, I shall be well repaid for a month's absence, if you

bring home a desire to watch and pray against those wrong impressions which your love to me has sometimes obtruded upon your mind. And I hope to study myself the lesson I recommend to you; and to strive and pray for the *ornament of a meek and quiet spirit*. But, alas! though I know in theory what a Christian should be, I am still sadly deficient in practice.

Give my love and thanks to all my kind friends. I was once without a friend; but God has since given me many. Who that had seen me as a slave in Africa, would have expected what has since taken place! How unworthy am I of all that I have received! I am most unworthy of the honor of preaching the Gospel, which I too long despised and blasphemed!

My evening walk was outwardly pleasant—but my mind was confused. However, I prayed for you. Let me be as I will in other respects, you are always present to my thoughts. My love has been growing from the day of marriage, and still it is in a growing state. It was once as an acorn—but it has now a deep root and spreading branches, like an old oak. It would not have proved so, if the Lord had not watered it with his blessing.

Olney, December 21.

As you intimate you shall not come before Saturday, I write again. I need not wish the interval away, though I long to see you: Saturday will soon be here. I thank the Lord, and I thank you, for your letter. Indeed, he has been very gracious in supporting you and your father, so much beyond expectation; surely my heart has had a fellow-feeling with you. But such *sorrow* as he by his grace is pleased to sanctify, will be hereafter numbered among our *mercies*. I often

speaking much in public, of his all-sufficiency to uphold under every trial. I have seldom had a more remarkable proof of it, than in the course of this late affliction. May he enable you to improve this instance of his goodness, as an argument against that vain reasoning of unbelief which has so often discouraged you. If he had not been with you, I am sure you would have been crushed like a moth. I hope, when we meet, we shall rejoice in his loving kindness; and that you will be able to say, "Because he has heard me, therefore I will call upon him as long as I live."

May we learn from what we have felt, and from what we daily see, of the vanity of all earthly things—to fix our thoughts upon the one thing needful; that we may experience his loving-kindness to be better than life itself, and may have a sure resource in his love, against the pressure of every remaining trial that may be allotted us; that we may rejoice as those who are still liable to be called to mourn, and mourn as those who have a happy prospect of rejoicing forever at last.

I thought on Monday morning that I was praying for you, while you were stepping into the coach. But, when you actually did set off yesterday, I was asleep. But the Shepherd of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, was pleased to watch over you in your journey; for which I desire to praise him. Sickness and death have entered many houses here since you left home. But we are still preserved. Our times are in the hands of him who cares for us.

I have had another peaceful night, and awoke this morning in health. I hope you can say the same. We lie down and arise in safety, because the Lord sustains us. Oh! to say, "*This God, this great God—is our God; our Sun, and Shield, and Portion!*" What a privilege is this! What a counterbalance for every trial! And since he has said to our

hearts, "Seek you my face," and has given us a desire to answer, "Your face, O Lord, will we seek," it is not possible that we should seek in vain. The Lord bless and keep you, lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.

London, August 26, 1775.

I must send you a short letter for once. May the Lord bless you, give you composure of mind, and do you good every day. I know you will be ready enough to come to me when you can, and therefore I leave the *when* to you. I prefer you to come on Monday—but if you stay until Tuesday, I will wait patiently. But you know I am not quite myself, when you are absent. I desire to always you always at my! Give my love to our dear adopted child, who, I hope and believe, will be a good girl. And I beg of her, and of all who are about her, that your rules, to which she cheerfully submits when at home, may be broken as little as possible. Tell all her friends that I love her, and accept her as my own child, and shall account the care of her to be one of the most important concerns of my life.

Olney, November 18.

I began to listen at four for the sound of the mail horn. I listened until five before I heard it. Soon after I received your dear letter. My heart traveled with you from stage to stage, and I set you down in the Old Jewry, just at the time you mention. But, oh! what cause have I to be thankful that you were shielded, by the Lord's protection, from the many possible events which might have spoiled my calculations, and sent me to bed tonight with an aching heart. I hope you are now

at Chatham. I have put you into the Lord's hand, who I trust will do you good. Yet I cannot help being anxious until I know how you felt, and what you met with, upon your arrival. If your dear father is still living, give my love and respect to him, and assure him that he is always in my thoughts and prayers. May the Lord support you and keep up your spirits, by a sense of his power and goodness!

Olney, November 21.

I told the people, on Sunday evening, my good news, and read your father's letter. Both he and you were earnestly prayed for. But I suppose more than a hundred were detained from us by colds and illness. There is scarcely a house without some people ill in it, and the general word is, that they never had such a sort of cold before. Many have taken to their beds; but in a few days most of them begin to amend.

W___ and R___ sent me word that their little girl was dying, and I have since heard she is dead. I expect to find them in much distress. Thus, at one time or another, every family and every person finds *vanity* entwined with their choicest comforts. It is best for us that it is so; for, poor and vain as this life is—we are too greatly attached to it. How strong then would our attachment to this world be—if we met with no trials or thorns along the way? Is not the history of every day, a comment upon those words, "Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy!" Micah 2:10.

I think you and I must acknowledge that the Lord has given us, from the beginning of our union, a favored lot. I think we have experienced as much of the good, and as few of the evils of life, as

any people whom we know. And yet, if we could fairly estimate all the pains, anxieties, and crosses we have met with, from first to last, it would make a considerable abatement in what, when taken in a more general view, may well be deemed a *happy state*. And how soon has the best of it passed away! Nothing now remains of many *endeared hours*—but the *remembrance*. Though we have had the best that such a life can afford, it would be a poor happiness, indeed—were this our all. But, blessed be God, who has given us a better hope than we had when we set out—for, I think, we then proposed no higher satisfaction than we could find in *each other*. It was well for us both that I was constrained to leave you for three long voyages—for, though those frequent separations were very irksome at the time, they were sanctified to make us look higher. Oh! he has led us wisely and graciously! He has done all things well. We have nothing now to ask—but for a deeper and more thankful sense of His goodness.

Olney, November 26.

I am thinking of you, and lifting up my heart for you, almost continually. You are in the *Lord's school*. He sent you, to give you the most satisfactory proofs of his goodness, to your father; which I hope will prove an encouragement, and a cause of great thankfulness, to yourself. He is very gracious, and, I trust, will show himself so to you, and in you. But you deprive yourself of comfort by listening to the *voice of unbelief*, which weakens your hands and prevents your progress. How often are you distressed, as though you were only to see the goodness of the Lord to others—and not to taste of it yourself! Yet the path of few people through life has been more marked with peculiar mercies than yours! How differently has he led us from the way we would have chosen for ourselves! We have had remarkable

turns in our affairs; but every *change* has been for the better, and in every *trouble* (for we have had our troubles) he has given us effectual help. Shall we not then believe that he will perfect that which concerns us?

When I was a mere child in grace, and knew not what I wanted, he sent you into the world to be, first, the principal hinge upon which my part and character in life was to turn, and then to be my companion. We have traveled together nearly twenty-six years; and, though we are changeable creatures, and have seen almost everything change around us—he has preserved our affections by his blessing, or we might have been weary of each other. How far we have yet to go, we know not; but the *greater* and (as to externals) the *pleasanter* part of our journey is probably passed over. If our lives are prolonged, the shadows of the *evening*, old age, with its attendant infirmities, will be pressing upon us soon. Yet I hope this uncertain remaining part of our pilgrimage will, upon the whole, be the best: for our God is all-sufficient, and can make us more happy by the light of his countenance, when our temporal comforts fail—than we ever were when we possessed them to the greatest advantage.

Olney, December 3.

When you told me that S____ was coming home, my heart sunk like a stone; but it soon revived upon finding you had altered your purpose. If she had come, I must either have sent her back again, or have set out myself to fetch you. If you were not where you are, she would be very useful to me here—I feel the need of her. But, as things stand, you must either both *come*, or both *stay*; for I would not have one comfortable day if you were alone at Chatham. Every inconvenience

will seem light, if compared with the thoughts of your being left by yourself. Your dear father is not acquainted either with my feelings or my situation; but you will do your best to apprise him of both.

As to your return, if there is good grounds to think that the time of *his departure* is near at hand, I ought not to desire it; but, if the unexpected turn the physician speaks of should prolong his life for months or years, and restore him to the same state in which you left him in September, your presence at home will soon be so necessary, that nothing but the most urgent call of duty can dispense with it. I speak not merely upon my own personal account; you are greatly needed by the sick, by the poor, and by your family. There are many things to which I cannot attend as I ought, while you are away. I hope, if your father recovers so far as to bear a relocation, he will give up business, and come and live with us; and spend the remnant of his days among those who can join with him in talking of that *better land* to which he is going, and in praising the Lord for his goodness.

I hope nothing that I have written will make you uneasy. My mind has been a little agitated; but, now that I have put down my thoughts upon paper, I am composed again. Your absence is, indeed, a trial; but who am I, that I should not have trials? Ah! I have deserved much more than this; even to be broken with breach upon breach, and to be deprived of you altogether. The Lord helps me, in some measure, to resign all to his disposal, and to say, *Not my will—but yours be done*. This separation is not like some which we have formerly known: there are no *oceans* between us now, nor am I under a painful suspense, as when I could not hear of you for a whole twelvemonth. Even then he was pleased to watch over us, to support us, and restore us to each other again and again. Therefore, *my soul—hope in God, for I shall yet praise him!* Yes, I will praise him now, for his goodness to you.

I know you have felt much: *afflictions must be felt to be sanctified*. But you have been strengthened according to your day. We seem, as I lately observed, to have had as smooth a journey, thus far, as most people. Yet, at intervals, our trials have been very sharp. Mine are always so when I feel for you; though few things, with which your peace or comfort are not connected, give me much trouble. I pay, at some seasons, a heavy tax for loving you, I had almost said too well: but I cannot love you too well, unless I love you improperly. I believe it was of the Lord's goodness that I loved you at first; and I am sure that both duty and gratitude bind me to love you now. The love which a husband should bear to his wife is expressed in very strong terms by the apostle, Eph. 5:25-28. But *you certainly have been my idol*—and I often fear you are too much so still. Alas! how difficult is it to draw the line exactly between *undervaluing* and *overvaluing* the gifts of God! The good Lord pity and pardon us both, and take such a full possession of our hearts—that no *rival* may interfere with what is due only to him!

Olney, December 7.

If your letters (as you think) afforded me neither pleasure nor comfort, I would not so earnestly wish you to write; but you may be assured they afford me both, and that, in your absence, nothing of a temporal kind can give me equal satisfaction. I usually grow thoughtful about four o'clock, when I expect the post is coming, until I hear the horn; then my spirits flutter. But, when I receive a letter from you, have read it, and find you were well, I presently feel composed, and, I hope, a little thankful. Thus it was tonight. Glad I am to hear that your dear father is preparing to part with his house, and seems not unwilling to come to *Olney*; where, I trust, he will find

me heartily joining with you to do everything in our power to make his remaining days comfortable.

The language of Psalm 40:5 suits my soul well, "Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders You have done. The things You planned for us no one can recount to You! Were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare!" There is no end to the inventory of my mercies! May He who has given so much to us, and done so much for us—add the crowning mercy of a thankful heart! Though I can talk of thankfulness, I feel much insensibility and hardness of heart; but, I know that, while sin dwells in me, it will have such effects. Sin will distress—but it cannot condemn, those who believe in Jesus.

In Isaiah 43:24-25, we have a character of the Lord's salvation: it is free—for his own sake. It is full—blotting out all sin, like a cloud, beyond recall and remembrance. And the subjects of this salvation—are those who have wearied him by their iniquities.

Olney, December 23.

Many *prayers* are offered for you; and I hope we shall soon have to offer *praise*. I pray, not only that we may be restored to each other—but that our long *separation* may be sanctified to us both. Though it has been a gentle trial, compared to what the Lord might justly have sent, and mingled with great mercies—yet a trial it is to me, and perhaps more so to you. Not that I mean to yield the palm to you, as if you can be more sensibly affected by separation than myself; but I allow that my situation at home is more pleasant than yours while abroad. Considered as a *trial*, we have cause to be thankful that it has been so much *sweetened*; and we should likewise aim to draw some

useful *lessons* from it. I feel I have only *learned* them—if I can but *practice* them.

I cannot feel how much I miss you, when you are from me but a few weeks, without thinking what support I should need if I was wholly deprived of you. The like thought, I suppose, is sometimes upon your mind. The hour will probably come, when we must experience the alternative of *leaving* or *being left*: for, though possible, it is not very likely that we shall both die at once. May the Lord impress the event of this *unknown hour* upon our minds; not to distress us—but to keep alive in us a sense of the *insignificance* of everything here—compared with the one thing needful! May He cause our faith to grow and take deep root, and fix in us such a persuasion of his all-sufficiency and grace, and of our saving interest in his promises, that we may trust and not be afraid—but cheerfully commit all that is before us to his care. He who has supported us for weeks, can support us for years, and make those things tolerable which seem the most formidable in prospect.

We are prone to be over-earnest about matters, which will one day appear to us of no more importance than the recollection of a dream! But, oh, the peace of God satisfies and fills the heart, and leaves but little room for anxious cares or worries about such trifles!

I acknowledge your kindness in sending me tolerably long letters; and, by way of thanks, I have this time taken a large sheet of paper, and will try to fill it. If I had leisure, and could find something to say, I would please myself with writing, not *sheets*—but *quires*. But I have many things to attend, and meet with hourly interruptions.

When I awakened our dear little girl this morning, I asked her for a text, and she very promptly gave me Isaiah 42:16, "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will

guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the crooked places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them." This verse contains an epitome an summary of my own history, and of yours also. How blind were we when the Lord brought us together! How little did we then think of the paths, by which, and to which—He had purposed to lead us. But He caused light to shine upon our darkness, and He has made a thousand crooked things straight before us, and we have good reason to trust His promise that He will not forsake us! Crooked things will occur in our path, now and then; but, if He is with us, we need not fear. And the time is short. May we learn to speak the Psalmist's language from our hearts, "Lord! what do we wait for? Our hope is in You." We have seen much of the good which this life, in a temporal view, can afford. We have felt enough of its evils to know that all here on earth, is mingled with vanity and vexation of spirit. And I trust that, before He takes us to our eternal home, that He will make us heartily willing to go, that we may behold Him who shed His precious blood to redeem our souls!

Olney, December 26.

The Lord is very good and gracious to me. He maintains my peace, and preserves me from a thousand evils and snares! But I feel much abomination in my heart. I can truly say, 'It is a cage of unclean and hateful birds!' I dare not entrust anyone, not even you—with a detail of the wild, foolish, and dreadful thoughts which often pester my mind. The Lord, who is infinitely holy, sees all—yet He bears with me, and permits me—as vile as I am—to call Him 'mine'! Is not this astounding? Oh, He is full of grace and mercy! I hope you think and find him so.

Yesterday was a busy time—but I was led comfortably through. I had a good night, and slept this morning until past seven. I am sufficiently indulgent to Mr. Self! Do not fear my pinching or overworking him. I need a spur—more than a bridle. You often think I do too much; I much oftener see cause to confess myself to be a slothful and unprofitable servant. In the concerns of immortal souls, with eternity in view, and so much depending upon the present moment—what assiduity and labor can be proportioned to the case! I ought to be always upon the wing, seizing any opportunity of aiming to be useful, whether by word or pen; and, of course, much more careful and diligent than I am to redeem the time. May the Lord pity and pardon us all, and make us as wise in our generation, as the men of the world are in theirs!

Olney, December 27.

We are all well; and therefore you need not be alarmed at my writing so soon. Mr. R___ called on me this morning, and, when I spoke of my intended journey, he said he must go to London soon, and that, if he could be of any service, he would suit his time to ours, and willingly conduct your father to Olney. When he first spoke, my *heart* answered, "Thank you for nothing; I do not choose to miss the pleasure of seeing my dear wife at least a whole week sooner than if I wait for her at home." But I soon considered Mr. R___ as an active, strong man, who has his eyes and his wits about him, and could, perhaps, upon many occasions, be much more helpful to my father than I could. So I must mention this to you, and, if you approve it, I must, for my father's sake, submit to stay a little longer before I see her. If you think that my coming will do as well or better, here I am in waiting. Nothing but prudence, and a sense of duty here, would

prevent my setting off towards you this night. I would much prefer it to going to bed. If it depended on my will only, I feel myself well-disposed to take a journey of five hundred miles, for one day or half a day of your company, if I could have it upon no easier terms. I need not multiply words; you well know that I cannot wish for an excuse to prevent my coming to you. But your father's safe and comfortable traveling is at present a chief object with me. I love him for his own sake; when he gave his consent that you should be mine, he laid me under an obligation which I can never repay; and, over and above all this, he is your father.

Olney, January 7, 1776.

For fear the snow should prevent my being with you on Tuesday, I write a hasty line to tell you that we are all well.

I suppose, if *SELF* had his will—he would think his journey to you of such importance, that no snow should have fallen to retard it, or make it inconvenient. Poor proud creature! What a presumptuous worm, to admit one thought against the appointment of the Most High God; instead of being duly thankful that you and I are safely sheltered, and well provided for, in this severe weather! What hardships are some people suffering this morning, while you, I hope, are sleeping peacefully in your bed, and I am sitting by a good fire. Far be it from us to repine, if in some things *our inclinations* are a little crossed. It is often, yes always, in *mercy* when they are. We have seen it so in many instances already, and shall hereafter see that it was so in all.

Let me beg you not to give way to fears on my account, nor to calculate the depth of the snow at present; nor of the floods, when

the snow shall melt. Since you have had an interest in me, the Lord has preserved me in the midst of many dangers, such as you can form no idea of. We may safely trust him now. His arm is not weary; he is always near us, and his providence is ever watchful over those who fear him. But I know I cannot reason away your apprehensions, any more than I can my own when they are exercised about you. I will therefore direct my thoughts upward, "Lord, keep her heart stayed upon you, and give her power to trust all in your hand, and submit all to your will! Amen."

Olney, January 9.

If I did not feel for your anxiety, I would be quite easy; for we are all well, and surrounded with mercies. I hoped to be in London tonight, and with you tomorrow; but the Lord appointed otherwise. The greatest fall of snow I ever remember, has prevented me; but I might have been prevented by illness. Until ten or eleven this morning, I thought of making myself as easy as I could at home. But, after the wagon came in, finding that the road was open to Newport, and it beginning to thaw, I supposed, if I could reach there, I would find the high road passable enough. As I chalked it out, I was to reach St. Alban's by eight, set out from thence at four tomorrow morning, breakfast in London, and drink tea in the afternoon with my dearest wife! Accordingly, about noon, we began our march. Mr. R___ led the van, I was in the center, and Richard brought up the rear. He was designed to bring the horses home. I was a little concerned how he would be able to manage the three horses; but my concern was needless, for we returned as we went. The road from Newport was impassable to carriages: neither carriage nor mail could move. I came safely home, well pleased that I had made the attempt, and

only anxious lest you should be alarmed. I wish you may be able to *drive* away your fears upon my account, or rather *pray* them away. I am in safe hands: the Lord is my Protector, and yours too. But, if your pain fill feelings cannot be avoided, may they be sanctified! My love is unwilling that you should have an uneasy moment; but the Lord's love is not only *tender*—but *wise*!

Nor let us regret that this fall of **snow** should prolong our separation. It fell by the direction of God's providence, both as to the time and the spot. And he likewise times our concerns; or the snow might have detained your father on the road, as I hear it has some company, who were glad to be sheltered in a small public-house by the road-side, and can neither get backward nor forward. Come—all is well. We are, indeed, asunder; but I am not in *Africa*. How things are now—we know. What unforeseen events the interposition of the snow may have prevented—we know not. As it is, the consciousness of loving and being beloved remains with us; and this is better than everything else would be without it.

Olney, January 20.

You say that you cannot describe your uneasiness, when you neither saw me, as you expected, nor heard from me. I need no description. I felt it for you. I well knew how you would be situated, unless you were apprized that the roads were stopped up. Had the snow fallen with you as with us, you would have accounted for my not coming. I think no motive, less powerful than yourself, would have induced me to go to Newport when I did. It was at least an unpleasant ride; and I could not have managed it had I been alone. We were obliged, in some places, to leave the road, which was impassable, and to go around the open fields; and, at times, both the horse and his rider

were almost buried in the snow. If either fatigue or expense could have prevented your anxiety, you would have had none. But I hope all is well over now.

It may help to make us patient, it should, indeed, make us thankful—to reflect upon the vast distress that *multitudes* are probably in, both by sea and land, at this moment while I am writing; some freezing with cold, others starving with hunger, some lost in the snow, others dashing against the rocks. Ah, my dearest, how has sin filled the world with woe! And we are sinners like others—but our sufferings are light, compared with what *others* really endure; and still more light, if compared with *our deserts*.

The Lord has done a great thing for us, in showing us the way of salvation. Here may our thoughts and desires chiefly fix. If sin is pardoned, if we are accepted in the Beloved—then He will guide us by the way, and heaven will be our portion at the end! Behold! He is seated on a throne of grace, and ready to bestow every blessing that we need, more than our scanty minds can either ask or conceive. I am at a distance from you. But, alas, what am I? If you were here, I could afford you no comfort or help—but by his blessing. But He can do you good without me. He can sensibly refresh you, or secretly support you, and be unto you as *rivers of water in a dry and weary place*.

Olney, January 29.

I am not surprised that you sometimes find it hard to be reconciled to your present situation. I was much comforted by the strain of cheerful submission expressed in your two former letters; but I know, from what passes in my own heart—that we cannot maintain

such a resigned frame of spirit by any power of our own. I wish you, however, to look back a month or two, to the time when you feared something had happened to me. You then thought, if you could be sure that I was well, you could make light of every inconvenience. The present severe weather is a dispensation from the Lord. Thousands feel much more terrible effects from it than we have felt; and I know no ground of claim that we have an *exemption* from a share in those trials to which all are exposed. May the Lord help us to submit, and wait patiently; for, after all, we can alter nothing. We may make things worse by a lack of resignation—but we cannot mend them.

I acknowledge that your part of the trial has been the hardest; yet mine has not been light, especially if what I have felt for you be taken into the account. Yet, upon the whole, the Lord keeps my mind attentive to what I have deserved, and to what others suffer; so that, in the main, I am quiet and peaceful. If either you or I, or our dear child, had been ill, the trial would have been much greater; yet even then we could not have helped ourselves.

Olney, January 30.

Writing to you is now almost the only thing to which I can attend. Let us try to be thankful that we are all well, and favored with the *necessities* and *comforts* of life. And let us pray that this separation, with all its inconveniences, may be sanctified. How often have I committed you and myself to the Lord, seemed willing that he should take his own methods with us, and that, in hope that he would make all things work together for our good, I would never presume to say to Him, '*What are You doing?*' And yet, when I think of your present distress, my spirits are so softened and affected, that I am ready to

overlook my innumerable causes for thankfulness. I can easily see how this trial may be one of the all things working together for our good—but it is *his blessing* which must make it so. For if left to myself, I am capable of forgetting both *corrections* and *comforts*.

I am writing by a good fire, and while I almost burn on one side, I feel the frost on the other. How true is that word, "Who can stand before his cold?" And there is another good word, which I hope, in due time, to see fulfilled: "He sends the snow like white wool; he scatters frost upon the ground like ashes. He hurls the hail like stones. Who can stand against his freezing cold? Then, at his command, it all melts. He sends his winds, and the ice thaws!" Psalms 147:16-18. He can make a speedy and powerful change in the weather. When He gives his commandment, it runs very swiftly.

Such likewise is his power over the heart. He can give peace for trouble, heal our sorrows, revive our graces, and make us joyful in tribulation. If He speaks—it is done. He can bring real and enduring good—out of seeming and transient evil, water out of the rocks, and honey out of lions. Oh! that I could leave you, myself, and my all—in His hands! Be still, and know that He is God, and stand still to see his salvation. The Lord has interposed. We must not complain; if we do, we directly find fault with Him who appoints the seasons and the weather!

Olney, February 1.

Your mournful letter made me thoroughly uneasy, until this evening about eight, when I was surprised by a note, informing me that your father was at Newport, where they could not get a carriage—but wished to come to Olney tonight, if I could send one. You may guess

how I ran and flew to get one. It set off soon; it is now ten o'clock, and I expect them in half an hour. Your being in the dumps, threw me into the dumps deep enough. I was distressed for your uneasiness—but still hoped what I wrote last would prevent his coming. For I was filled with the most alarming apprehensions of your father's traveling in this weather. I thought the frost would seize his legs, and imagined I saw the carriage stopped in the snow, or overturned, and that he, incapable of helping himself, would be frozen to death. The messenger arrived more than an hour before your second letter, or it would have increased my fears, to have been informed that he was actually upon the road.

I have not felt my own weakness, and lack of dependence upon God, more sensibly a great while. But I hope, when he shall have brought us happily together, what we have suffered for each other, during these last eleven weeks, will be remembered by us with thankfulness and to profit.

P.S. Your father arrived at half-past ten, safe, and well, as full of spirits as a young man, or as if he had but just risen from bed. He is very well this morning, and so we are all; and every face about me looks more pleasant, as we now can form a reasonable hope of seeing you soon.

London, Hoxton, August 6, **1785**.

I long to hear that you had a comfortable journey to Southampton, and that you are now with our dear friends. Nothing has taken place among us that can be properly called *new*; which is a great mercy. For, though you have been gone but one day, a single day, or a single hour—may produce painful alterations in a family. The Lord has

preserved us through a long course of years, and in different situations, from various calamities which have overtaken others. Our obligations to thankfulness are singular and numerous.

When the carriage drove past the corner, my heart seemed to go away with it. It contained what was of more value to me than the cargoes of a whole East India fleet. Tell our niece Eliza that I love her very dearly. I feel parting with you and with her; but I can cheerfully submit to anything that may, by the Lord's blessing, contribute to her recovery or relief. She would soon be well—if I could make her so. But she is in *better hands* than mine. I have a comfortable hope that her illness has been, and will be, sanctified to an end far more desirable than health or life itself. Therefore I leave her to the wise and merciful direction of the Lord, who, I trust, loves her better than I can.

I cannot write a long letter tonight. What could I, indeed, say, if I had more time, that I have not said a thousand times over? Yet there still is, and will be, something unsaid in my heart, which I have not words to express. May the Lord bless this *little separation* to quicken us to mutual prayer, and to lead us to a thankful review of the mercy and goodness which have followed us through the many years we have been united.

How many *changes* have we seen! Under how many *trials* have we been supported! How many *deliverances* have we known! How many *comforts* have we enjoyed! Especially, what great *advantages* have we possessed, for seeking and knowing the things which pertain to everlasting peace!

The years we have passed together—will return no more. The *afflictions* are gone, the *pleasures* likewise are gone, forever. The longer we live, such pleasures as this world can afford, will, more and

more, lose their power of pleasing. Only our love, I trust, will exist and flourish to the end of life, yes, beyond it! It will always be a truth, that the Lord, in giving you to me—gave me the best temporal desire of my heart. But the shadows of the *evening* advance. *Old age* is growing upon us, and the days are approaching when we shall have no pleasure but what we can derive from the good Word of God, and the consolations of his Holy Spirit. These, if we are favored with them, will sufficiently compensate for the abatement, or the loss, of all the rest. The *streams* may run dry—but the *fountain* of living waters will always flow! May his presence be near our hearts, and then all will be well.

I am too fully employed to feel time hang heavy upon my hands in your absence; and, if I am permitted to come to you, the thoughts of the journey's end will make the journey pleasant.

Hoxton, August 17.

I thank my dear friends for their great kindness to you; tell them that I shall be glad to be with you, to share in it. But I cannot come, with propriety, at present. I hope Eliza will be able to bathe soon; and, as you are upon the spot, I think you must wait a while. Dependence and submission, in the use of prudent means, are our parts; events are in the hand of God. It was right that you should go to a proper place, whether she can bathe or not, now she is there, because the attempt was thought advisable. And, if bathing would be useful, I think she will yet be able. If not, you have acted to the best of your judgment. What we call disappointments, are God's dispensations, which, if rightly improved, will answer valuable purposes, and we shall hereafter see cause to be thankful for them. I am willing to think that I love Eliza almost, if not altogether, as well as you do. But

there is an over-anxiety attending your love, which hurts you, and can do her no good. Your reflections upon this subject please me. I would do, I would suffer, much for her advantage. But still we are creatures. Our Lord God has an absolute right to dispose of us, and of ours, as he sees fit. And as he is sovereign, so he is wise and good. It is a great mercy to be enabled to yield to his will; for everything, and every heart, must either bend or break before it.

What shall I say by way of close? What—but breathe out the warmest wishes of my heart to you and for you. Daily and often I thank the Lord for giving you to me at first, and for sparing you to me so long. How very different would the history of my life have been, if yours had not been connected with it! That my *idolatrous* regard had so happy an outcome, and that my sin and folly have not yet deprived me of you, are proofs of His singular mercy to me. I have innumerable comforts to be thankful for; but my heart is so intimately united to you, that I scarcely seem susceptible either of pleasure or pain—but with some reference to you. Thus it was when our union commenced, and thus it has been every day since, to this hour. If I could say with confidence, that I hold you now in your proper place of subordination to him who gave you to me, then I need not scruple to profess that your *peace*, your *welfare*, and your *love*, are dearer to me than all earthly things. The latter I can say with truth; I hesitate about the former. I fear you are too much my *idol* still. May the good Lord pardon me in this thing. My choicest comfort has been, too often, the occasion of showing me the evil and ingratitude of my heart in the strongest light. Oh, that we may both have grace to live the remainder of our days to Him! Do, my dearest wife, pray for me, pray earnestly for me; and may He return all the good you can ask for me a thousand-fold into your own bosom!

Hoxton, August 23.

I thank you for your letter; and I thank the Lord that dear Eliza is able to bathe. May his blessing attend every means for her relief; and, especially, may her soul prosper! She and you are daily and hourly remembered. You express the very sentiments of my heart. I am well and comfortable, in the main; but there is a lack of something, when you are absent, which no creature can make up. I hope we shall meet to praise Him soon; but, I believe, I must wait until after the fourth of September. I hope I shall then procure a proper supply for a Sunday or two. If it is the Lord's good pleasure that I shall come to you, it will be made practicable.

I cannot but wish, with you, that we may not be separated again; but it is of more importance to wish and pray that our present separation may be sanctified to us. Many things offer to amuse us: some deserve and require a degree of our attention; but one thing is especially needful. What a mercy is it that this one thing, which mountains of gold and silver cannot purchase, is to be had without money and without price! May the Lord engrave it deeply on your heart and mine! His name is Love; his Word is Power. As sure as the sun will rise tomorrow, so sure is his promise, that He will never cast out those who come unto him. If we have a desire for his blessings, He first gave it them to us, and therefore will not disappoint us. I long to see and hear you rejoicing in his salvation. He only knows the many prayers I have offered for you; I trust not in vain. I cannot doubt but the one thing needful is your chief desire. Everything else will shortly fail us; but the blessings of the Gospel will last through life, through death, and to eternity.

Hoxton, August 27.

I laid me down in peace, and awoke in safety—for the Lord sustained me. He is about our path by day, and our bed by night, and preserves us from innumerable evils, which would come upon us every hour if his watchful providence did not protect us! He is our sure, though invisible, shield; therefore we are unhurt, though, in ourselves, we are weak and defenseless, like a city without walls or gates, and open to excursions from every quarter. Could we but live more sensible of his goodness, and maintain that feeling of gratitude towards him which we do to some of our fellow-creatures, we would be happy. For what is the great design of the Gospel? Is it not to introduce us into a state of the most honorable and interesting friendship, and to perpetuate to us the pleasure which we find in pleasing those who are dearest to us? The Lord Jesus is our best Friend: his character is supremely excellent, our obligations to him are inexpressible, our dependence upon him is absolute, and our happiness, in every sense, is in his hands. May our love therefore be fixed upon him, and we shall do well. He will guide us with His eye, guard us by his power, and his fullness and bounty will supply all our needs.

As to dear Eliza, I hope I have made up my mind about her. If her recovery could be purchased, I think I would bid as high for it as my ability would reach, provided it was the Lord's will. But I am so short-sighted that I dare not ask for the continuance of her life, (nor even of yours,) but with a reserve of submission to his wisdom. I know not what might be the possible consequences, if I could have my own will. I know He can restore her—and I believe He will, if it is for the best. If not, I desire to *submit*, or rather, to *acquiesce*, to be satisfied. I shall feel for myself if she dies; and probably my feeling will be doubled and accented upon your account. But He can support us, and sanctify the painful dispensation to us both. I pray to be enabled to entrust and resign everything to him. This is not an easy lesson to flesh and blood; but grace can make it practical. For the

rest, if she should die in a moment, I have reason to be quite easy about the event, as to herself. And, if she should decline gradually, I have little doubt but the Lord will enable her to speak to the comfort and satisfaction of all about her. *She is in his wise and merciful hands—and there I am content to leave her.*

I think of our hoped-for meeting on Tuesday next with much the same anticipation of pleasure, as when I have formerly been on the return to you from an African voyage. What difference there is, I compare to the difference between the *blossom* and the *fruit*. The blessing of the Lord upon our connection has, in the course of thirty-five years, ripened the passion of love into a solid and inexpressibly tender friendship; which, I trust, in its most valuable properties, will exist forever. I shall never find words fully to tell you how much I owe you, how truly I love you, nor the one half of what my heart means, when I subscribe myself,
Your most affectionate and obliged husband.

APPENDIX

A relation of some particulars, respecting the cause, progress, and close, of the last illness of my late dear wife.

Among my readers, there will, doubtless, be some of a gentle, sympathizing spirit, with whom I am not personally acquainted; and perhaps their feelings may so far interest them in my concerns, as to make them willing to read a brief account of my late great trial. I shall allot a few pages to this purpose, by way of close to my book, and to my history.

My dear wife had naturally a good constitution, and was favored with good spirits to the last. But the violent shock she sustained in the year 1754, when I was suddenly attacked by a fit, (I know not of what kind,) which left me no sign of life for about an hour but breathing, made as sudden a change in her habit, and subjected her, from that time, to a variety of chronic complaints. She was several times confined, for five or six months, to her chamber, and often brought so low, that her recovery was deemed hopeless. I believe she spent ten years out of forty that she was spared to me, (if all the days of her sufferings were added together,) in illness and pain. But she had likewise long intervals of health. The fit I have mentioned (the only one I ever had) was the means the Lord was pleased to appoint in answer to my prayers, to free me from the irksome sea-faring life in which I was until then engaged, and to appoint me a settlement on shore.

Before our removal from Liverpool, she received a blow upon her left breast, which occasioned her some pain and anxiety for a little time—but which soon wore off. A small lump remained in the part affected—but I heard no more of it for many years. I believe that, latterly, she felt more than I was aware of; but her tenderness for me made her conceal it as long as possible. I have often since wondered at her success; and how I could be kept so long ignorant of it.

In the month of October, 1783, she applied, unknown to me, to a friend of mine, an eminent surgeon. Her design was, if he approved it, to submit to an operation, and so to adjust time and circumstances with him, that it might be performed in my absence, and before I could know it. But the surgeon told her that the malady was too far advanced, and the tumor (the size of which he compared to the half of a melon) was too large to warrant the hope of being extracted, without the most imminent danger of her life, and that he dared not

attempt it. He could give her but little advice, more than to keep herself as quiet, and her mind as cozy as possible; and little more encouragement, than by saying, that the pains to which she was exposed, were generally rendered tolerable by the use of laudanum (a narcotic); to which, however, she had a dislike, little short of an antipathy.

I cannot easily describe the composure and resignation with which she gave me this recital, the next day, of her interview with the surgeon; nor of the sensations of my mind while I heard it. My conscience told me, that I had well deserved to be wounded where I was most sensible; and that it was my duty to submit with silence to the will of the Lord. But I strongly felt that, unless He was pleased to give me this submission, I was more likely to toss like a wild bull in a net, in defiance of my better judgment.

Soon after, the Lord was pleased to visit our dear adopted daughter with a dreadful fever, which, at first, greatly affected her nerves, and afterwards became putrid. She was brought very near to the grave indeed; for we, once or twice, thought her actually dead. But He, who in the midst of judgment remembers mercy, restored her, and still preserves her, to be the chief temporal comfort of my old age, and to afford me the greatest alleviation of the loss I was soon to experience, that the case could admit.

The attention and anxiety occasioned by this heavy dispensation, which lasted during the whole of a very severe winter, were by no means suited to promote that tranquility of mind which the doctor wished my dear wife would endeavor to preserve. She was often much fatigued, and often much alarmed. Next to each other, this dear child had the nearest place both in her heart and mine. The effects were soon apparent; as the spring of 1789 advanced, her

malady rapidly increased; her pains were almost incessant, and often intense, and she could seldom lie one hour in her bed in the same position. Oh! my heart, what did you then suffer!

But, in April, the God who hears prayer mercifully afforded relief, and gave such a blessing to the means employed, that her pains ceased. And though, I believe, she never had an hour of perfect ease, she felt little of the distressing pains incident to her malady from that time to the end of her life, (which was about twenty months,) excepting at three or four short intervals, which, taken together, hardly amounted to two hours: and these returns of anguish, I thought, were permitted to show me how much I was indebted to the goodness of God for exempting her feelings, and my sympathy, from what would have been terrible indeed!

In the close of the summer she was able to go to Southampton, and returned tolerably well.

She was twice at church in the first week after she came home. She then went no more abroad, except in a coach, for a little air and exercise; but she was cheerful, tolerably easy, slept as well as most people who are in perfect health, and could receive and converse with her kind friends who visited her.

It was not long after, that she began to have a distaste for food, which continued and increased; so that, perhaps, her death was at last rather owing to weakness from lack of nourishment, than to her primary disorder. Her dislike was, first, to butcher's meat, of which she could bear neither the sight nor the smell. Poultry and fish, in their turns, became equally distasteful. She retained some relish for small birds, a while after she had given up the rest; but it was at a season when they were difficult to be obtained. I hope I shall always feel my obligations to the kind friends who spared no pains to

procure some for her, when they were not to be had in the markets. At that time I set more value upon a dozen of larks, than upon the finest ox in Smithfield. But her appetite failed to these also, when they became more plentiful.

Under this trying discipline I learned, more sensibly than ever, to pity those whose sufferings of a similar kind are aggravated by poverty. Our distress was not small; yet we had everything within reach that could, in any degree, conduce to her refreshment or relief; and we had faithful and affectionate servants, who were always willingly engaged to their power, yes, as the apostle speaks, beyond their power, in attending and assisting her, by night and by day. What must be the feelings of those who, when afflicted with grievous diseases, pine away, unpitied, unnoticed, without help, and, in a great measure, destitute of common necessaries? This reflection, among others, contribute to quiet my mind, and to convince me that I had still much more cause for thankfulness, than for complaint.

For about a twelvemonth of her confinement, her spirits were good, her patience was exemplary, and there was a cheerfulness in her looks and her language that was wonderful. Often the liveliness of her remarks has forced a smile from us, when the tears were in our eyes. Whatever little contrivances she formed for her amusement in the course of the day, she would attend to nothing until she had finished her stated reading of the Scripture; in which she employed much time and great attention. I have her Bible by me, (which I would not part with for half the manuscripts in the Vatican,) in which almost every principal text, from the beginning to the end of the book, is marked in the margin with a pencil, by her own dear hand. The good Word of God was her medicine and her food, while she was able to read it. She read Dr. Watts's Psalms and Hymns, and the Olney Hymns, in the same manner. There are few of them in

which one, two, or more verses, are not thus marked; and in many, which I suppose she read more frequently, every verse is marked.

But in October the enemy was permitted, for a while, to take advantage of her bodily weakness, to disturb the peace and serenity of her mind. Her thoughts became clouded and confused; and she gradually lost, not only the comfortable evidence of her own interest in the precious truths of the Bible—but she lost all hold of the truth itself. She doubted the truth of the Bible, or whether truth existed. And, together with this, she expressed an extreme reluctance to death; and could not easily bear the most distant hint of her approaching end, though we were expecting it daily and hourly. This was the acme, the high-water mark of my trial; this was hard to bear indeed.

My readers, perhaps, will scarcely believe that I derived some consolation, during this gloomy period, from perceiving that her attachment to me was very sensibly abated. She spoke to me with an indifference of which, a little before, she was incapable. If, when the Lord's presence was withdrawn, and she could derive no comfort from his Word, she had found some relief from my being with her, or from hearing me speak, I should have been more grieved. Her affection to me, confirmed by so many proofs in the course of forty years, was not to be impeached by this temporary suspension of its exercise. I judged the same of the frame of her mind, as to her spiritual concerns: I ascribed them both to the same causes, her bodily weakness, and the power of temptation. She was relieved in both respects, after about a two weeks spent in conflict and dismay. The Lord restored peace to her soul; and then her former tenderness to me immediately revived. Then, likewise, she could calmly speak of her approaching dissolution. She mentioned some particulars concerning her funeral, and our domestic concerns, with great

composure. But her mind was not so fully restored to its former tone, as to give her freedom to enlarge upon her hopes and views as I had wished, until near her dissolution; and then she was too low to speak at all.

One addition to our trial yet remained. It had been our custom, when she went from the sofa to her bed, to exert herself for my encouragement, to show me how well she could walk. But it pleased the Lord that, by some alteration which affected her spine, she was disabled from moving herself; and other circumstances rendered it extremely difficult to move her. It has taken five of us nearly two hours to move her from one side of the bed to the other; and, at times, even this was impracticable: so that she has lain more than a week exactly in the same spot, without the possibility of changing her position. All this was necessary on my account. The rod had a voice; and it was the voice of the Lord. I understood the meaning no less plainly than if He had spoken audibly from heaven, and said, "*Now contemplate your idol! Now see what she is, whom you once presumed to prefer to Me!*" Even this bitter cup was sweetened by the patience and resignation which He gave her. When I have said, "You suffer greatly;" her answer usually was, "I suffer, indeed—but not greatly." And she often expressed her thankfulness, that, though her body was immovable, she was still permitted the use of her hands.

One of the last sensible concerns she felt respecting this world was, when my honored friend, patron, and benefactor, the late John Thornton, Esq. of Clapham, was removed to a better world. She revered and regarded him, I believe, more than she did any person upon earth; and she had reason. Few had nearer access to know and admire his character; and perhaps none were under greater, if equal, obligations to him than we. She knew of his illness—but was always

afraid to inquire after the event; nor should I have ventured to inform her—but that the occasion requiring me to leave her for four or five hours, when I hardly expected to find her alive at my return, I was constrained to give her the reason of my absence. She eagerly replied, "Go by all means; I would not have you stay with me upon any consideration." I put the funeral ring I was favored with into her hands; she put it first to her lips, and then to her eyes, bedewing it with her tears. I trust they soon met again. But she survived him more than a month.

Her head became so affected, that I could do little more than sit and look at her. Our fellowship by words was nearly broken off. She could not easily bear the sound of the gentlest foot upon the carpet; nor of the softest voice. On Sunday, the 12th of December, when I was preparing for church in the morning, she sent for me, and we took a final farewell as to this world. She faintly uttered an endearing compellation, which was familiar to her, and gave me her hand, which I held while I prayed by her bed-side. We exchanged a few tears; but I was almost as unable to speak as she was. But I returned soon after, and said, "If your mind, as I trust, is in a state of peace, it will be a comfort to me if you can signify it by holding up your hand." She held it up, and waved it to and fro several times.

That evening, her speech, her sight, and, I believe, her hearing, wholly failed. She continued perfectly composed, without taking notice of anything, or discovering any sign of pain or uneasiness until Wednesday evening towards seven o'clock. She then began to breathe very hard: her breathing might be called groaning, for it was heard in every part of the house; but I believe it was entirely owing to the difficulty of expiration, for she lay quite still, with a placid countenance, as if in a gentle slumber. There was no struggle, nor a feature ruffled. I took my post by her bed-side, and watched her

nearly three hours, with a candle in my hand, until I saw her breathe her last, on the 15th of December, 1790, a little before ten in the evening.

When I was sure she was gone, I took off her ring, according to her repeated injunction, and put it upon my own finger. I then kneeled down, with the servants who were in the room, and returned the Lord my sincere thanks for her deliverance and her peaceful dismissing.

How wonderful must be the moment after death! What a transition did she then experience! She was instantly freed from sin, and all its attendant sorrows, and, I trust, instantly admitted to join the heavenly choir. That moment was remarkable to me likewise. It removed from me the chief object which made another day or hour of life, as to my own personal concern, desirable. At the same time, it set me free from a weight of painful feelings and anxieties, under which nothing short of a divine power could have so long supported me.

I believe it was about two or three months before her death, when I was walking up and down the room, offering disjointed prayers from a heart torn with distress, that a thought suddenly struck me, with unusual force, to this effect: "The promises of God must be true; surely the Lord will help me, if I am willing to be helped!" It occurred to me, that we are often led, from a vain complacence in what we call our sensibility, to indulge that unprofitable *grief* which both our duty and our peace require us to resist to the utmost of our power. I instantly said aloud, "Lord, I am helpless indeed, in myself—but I hope I am willing, without reserve, that you should help me."

It had been much upon my mind from the beginning of this trial, that I was a minister, and that the eyes of many were upon me; that my

turn of preaching had very much led me to endeavor to comfort the afflicted, by representing the Gospel as an effectual remedy for every evil, a full compensation for every need or loss to those who truly receive it; so that, though a believer may be afflicted, he cannot be properly unhappy, unless he gives way to self-will and unbelief. I had often told my hearers, that a state of trial, if rightly improved, was to the Christian, a post of honor, affording the fairest opportunity of exemplifying the power of divine grace, to the praise and glory of the Giver. It had been, therefore, my frequent daily prayer, that I might not, by impatience or despondence, be deprived of the advantage my situation afforded me, of confirming, by my own practice, the doctrine which I had preached to others, and that I might not give them occasion to apply to me the words of Eliphaz to Job; (Job 4:4-6) "Your words have strengthened the fallen; you steadied those who wavered. But now when trouble strikes, *you* faint and are broken. Does your reverence for God give you no confidence? Shouldn't you believe that God will care for those who are upright?" And I had not prayed in vain. But from the time that I so remarkably felt myself willing to be helped, I might truly say to the praise of the Lord, "My heart trusted in Him, and I was helped" indeed.

Through the whole of my painful trial, I attended all my stated and occasional services, as usual; and a stranger would scarcely have discovered, either by my words or looks, that I was in trouble. Many of our intimate friends were apprehensive, that this long affliction, and especially the closing event, would have overwhelmed me; but it was far otherwise. It did not prevent me from preaching a single sermon—and I preached on the day of her death.

After she was gone, my willingness to be helped, and my desire that the Lord's goodness to me might be observed by others for their encouragement, made me indifferent to some laws of established

custom—the breach of which is often more noticed than the violation of God's commands. I was afraid of sitting at home, and indulging myself by poring over my loss; and therefore I was seen in the street, and visited some of my serious friends the very next day. *I likewise preached three times while she lay dead in the house.* Some of my brethren kindly offered their assistance; but, as the Lord was pleased to give me strength, both of body and mind, I thought it my duty to stand up in my place as formerly. And after she was deposited in the vault, *I preached her funeral sermon,* with little more sensible emotion than if it had been for another person. I have reason to hope that many of my hearers were comforted and animated under their afflictions, by what they saw of the Lord's goodness to me in my time of need. And I acknowledge that it was well worth standing a while in the fire, for such an opportunity of experiencing and exhibiting the power and faithfulness of his promises.

I was not supported by lively sensible consolations—but by being enabled to realize to my mind some great and leading truths of the Word of God. I saw, what indeed I knew before—but never until then so strongly and so clearly perceived, that, as a sinner, I had no right; and, as a believer, I could have no reason to complain. I considered her as a *loan*, which He who lent her to me had a right to resume whenever He pleased; and that as I had deserved to forfeit her every day from the first, it became me rather to be thankful that she was spared to me so long, than to resign her with reluctance when called for. Farther, that his *sovereignty* was connected with infinite *wisdom* and *goodness*; and that consequently, if it were possible for me to alter any part of his plan, I could only spoil it—that such a short-sighted creature as I, so blind to the possible consequences of my own wishes, was not only *unworthy*—but *unable*, to choose well for myself; and that it was therefore my great mercy and privilege that the Lord condescended to choose for me. May such

considerations powerfully affect the hearts of my readers under their troubles, and then I shall not regret having submitted to the view of the public, a detail which may seem more proper for the subject of a private letter to a friend. They who can feel for me, will, I hope, excuse me. And it is chiefly for their sakes that I have written it.

When my wife died, the world seemed to die with her—I hope to revive no more! I see little now—but my ministry and my Christian profession, to make a continuance in life, for a single day, desirable; though I am willing to wait my appointed time. If the world cannot restore her to me, (not that I have the remotest wish that her return was possible,) it can do nothing for me. The Bank of England is too poor to compensate for such a loss as mine. But the Lord, the all-sufficient God, speaks, and it is done. Let those who know him, and trust him, be of good courage. He can give them *strength* according to their day; he can increase their strength as their trials are increased, to any assignable degree. And what he *can* do, he has promised he *will* do. The power and faithfulness on which the successive changes of day and night, and of the seasons of the year, depend, and which uphold the stars in their orbits, is equally engaged to support his people, and to lead them safely and unhurt (if their path is so appointed) through floods and flames. Though I believe she has never yet been (and probably never will be) out of my waking thoughts for five minutes at a time; though I sleep in the bed in which she suffered and languished so long; I have not had one uncomfortable day, nor one restless night, since she left me. I have lost a right hand, which I cannot but miss continually; but the Lord enables me to go on cheerfully without it.

May his blessing rest upon the reader! May glory, honor, and praise, be ascribed to his great and holy name, now and forever! Amen.

"Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains!" Habakkuk 3:17-19

The Constraining Influence of the Love of Christ

by John Newton, March 30, 1800

"If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For **the love of Christ compels us**, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." 2 Corinthians 5:13-15

The apostles, and first preachers of the gospel among the heathen, exhibited to them a phenomenon perfectly new. The Greeks and Romans had known people, among themselves, who had strenuously exerted their talents and activity in the pursuit of fame, power, or wealth; but they now saw men no less indefatigable and persevering in prosecuting a design, which, far from procuring them either honor or profit, exposed them, wherever they went, to contempt, stripes, imprisonment, and death! Their professed aim was to make others as happy as themselves in the possession of an unseen Good. For the attainment of this end, they willingly gave up all prospect of worldly advantage, though they were generally treated with scorn and cruelty by the most of those whose best interests they wished to serve. This

was a *unselfish benevolence* of which the philosophers, the pretended friends of wisdom and virtue, had no idea; nor were the means they employed better understood. *They preached Jesus Christ, and him crucified!* (1 Corinthians 2:2) For, endeavoring to persuade their hearers to place their whole hope and dependence upon one whom they had never seen—but who had been publicly executed as a malefactor; and to affirm that this Jesus, who died upon the cross, was yet alive; (Mark 15:31) that he, who could not save himself from an ignominious death, was the author of eternal salvation to those who believed on him; for these strange assertions, they were pitied or despised as enthusiasts, by those who did not revile them as hypocrites. Thus Festus, who seemed to have a favorable opinion of Paul's integrity, when he heard him relate the manner of his conversion, thought that no man in his sober senses, could talk so; and therefore he said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself!" (Acts 26:24)

But His Lord and Master was treated thus before him, and upon similar grounds. His zeal for the honor of his heavenly Father, and his compassion for the souls of men carried him so far, that we read that his friends, that is, his relations according to the flesh, and who really wished him well, sought to lay hold of him, and restrain him; for, they said, "He is out of His mind!" (Mark 3:21)

The apostle Paul was not deranged; he spoke the words of truth and soberness; he knew whom he had believed; he knew the worth of immortal souls, and the importance of eternity. He had once fiercely opposed the gospel, breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, and, not content with the mischief he had done in Jerusalem, was hastening to Damascus to vex and persecute the believers there (Acts 9). But he was arrested in his journey by a light and a voice from heaven; he found himself in the power of that Jesus

whom he had persecuted, and who is pleased to consider all that is done, either for or against his people, as done to himself. The furious Saul of Tarsus, was humbled, pardoned, and, in a few days, commissioned to preach that faith which he had so pertinaciously labored to destroy. From that hour renouncing all connection with his former friends, the chief priests and council, and all expectations from them, renouncing likewise that righteousness of the law in which he before had boasted—he devoted himself to the service of his Lord and Savior, and of the cause which he had opposed.

His ardor was astonishing and exemplary. Unwearied by *labor*, undismayed by *danger*, unaffected by *hardship* and *suffering*—but supported and cheered by the presence of him whom he served—he preached the gospel in season and out of season, publicly and from house to house, in Judea, in Asia, in Greece, in Italy, and many other parts of the Roman empire. For this *zeal* in seeking to promote the good of others, of strangers, of enemies, at the expense of all that was dear to himself as a man—he found, as he expected, in almost every place which he visited, open oppositions, and secret conspiracies against his life—he was scourged by the Jews, beaten with rods by the Romans, and confined in prisons and chains. He was likewise the marked object of general contempt; the wise men of the times despised him as a babbler; he was regarded by many as the *filth of the world*, and the offscouring of all things; many said, "*Away with such a fellow from the earth, it is not fit that he should live!*" (Acts 22:22) But when, in defiance of all discouragements, he still pressed forward, as if he had done nothing, while anything more remained to be done, accounted the *disgrace* he met with his honor, and gloried in his chains, (Acts 28:20) we cannot wonder if the *more* moderate of his observers, who knew not his principles, thought that he was surely deranged.

The only apology he saw fit to make is expressed in my text. The bulk of mankind in Christendom, by whatever name they are distinguished, pay little more regard to the gospel, than the Jews or Heathen did in the apostle's days. The heart of man, in its natural state, is the same in all ages, devoid of either taste or inclination for the things of God until visited by power from on high. Faithful ministers are still liable to be thought deranged, by some, for the subject-matter of their discourses; by others for the importunity and freedom of their addresses to the consciences of their bearers. We are, however, encouraged by Paul's example, and we adopt his apology, "If it seems that we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God." We speak in his name, and the message we deliver, so far as agreeable to the Scripture, is from him, and to him we are responsible. If we are sober, if we expostulate and reason with you in pointed language upon the uncertainty of life, the certainty of death, and a future judgment, and other truths, which none but infidels will venture to deny, it is for your sakes.

The word *enthusiasm* is often used, by the same person, in two very different senses. It is a term of commendation when applied to orators, poets, painters, or sculptors, and expresses the *energy of genius*. No one is expected to excel in the fine arts without a measure of enthusiasm, and it is supposed essential to military prowess. But it has quite another acceptance in religious concerns. If a minister of the gospel is warm and earnest, he is frequently stigmatized as an *enthusiast*, that is, as the imposters of the name would have it understood, a person of a weak mind, and disordered judgment, if he is really sincere—for, many are willing to suppose that his enthusiasm is no more than a mask or veil, assumed to cover the self-serving views of a deceptive hypocrite.

For myself, it is a small thing for me to be judged by man's judgment. (1 Corinthians 4:3) At my time of life, nearly the close of my seventy-fifth year, it behooves me to think it very possible, yes, not improbable, that every time I appear in the pulpit may be my last; and, when I look round upon this respectable congregation, I doubtless see some people before me who will never hear me again. Perhaps we shall meet no more in this world; but we shall certainly meet before the tribunal of the Great Judge, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden. Then I must give an account of my ministry, and you must give an account of yourselves to God. Surely, if I believe what the Scripture teaches of the evil of sin, the glory of the Savior, the worth of the soul, and the importance of eternity—you will allow me to speak with the same degree of emotion. As this may be my last opportunity, if there were but one person among us, who has not yet attended duly to these great subjects, I must not let him depart as he came; I must warn him by the terrors of the Lord; I must beseech him by God's tender mercies (2 Corinthians 5:11, Romans 12:1). I am desirous to save both my own soul and the souls of those that hear me. (1 Timothy 4:16) Whether I am beside myself, or sober, it is for the cause of God and for your sakes. *The love of Christ constrains me.*

We may observe from this passage,

- I. The grand leading *motive* of the apostle's conduct, "The love of Christ constrains us."
2. Two *doctrines* which virtually comprehend the whole subjects of the gospel-ministry:
 - a. The provision which the mercy of God made for the recovery of fallen man, "One died for all;" from whence he infers,

b. "Then were all dead."

3. The *end* he had in view, and which he hoped and expected to obtain, by insisting on these truths wherever he went— "That those who live, should not, henceforth, live to themselves—but to him who died for them and rose again."

I. The love of Christ was the apostle's chief MOTIVE—it constrained him; bore him along like a torrent, in defiance of labor, hardship, and opposition. Many of us know the force of love in social life, and feel a readiness to do, bear, or forbear much for those whom we greatly love.

There is no love which can be compared with the love of Christ. He is God manifest in the flesh; all things were created by Him, and for Him. This high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, in the fullness of time, assumed our nature, was born of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those that were under the law—so that sinners, believing in Him, might not only escape deserved condemnation—but actually become His children!

For this great purpose, though truly God, He emptied Himself and appeared upon earth in the form of a servant, submitted to a state of poverty, reproach, and opposition, was despised and rejected of men, lived a suffering life, and terminated His sufferings by a cruel and ignominious death—for He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!

The LAMB, once upon the cross, is now the Lamb upon the throne, possessing and exercising all power in heaven and on earth. Yet He is still mindful of those for whom He suffered; His heart is made of tenderness; His affections melt with love; He appears in the presence of God for them, as their great High Priest, Advocate and Intercessor.

By His holy Word He invites, and by the power of His Holy Spirit He draws, and encourages, and enables the weary and heavy-laden to come unto Him for rest. He promises to save them to the uttermost; to support and guide them safely through all their conflicts, temptations, and trials; to lead them safely through the dark valley of the shadow of death; and then to receive them to Himself, that they may be forever with Him to behold his glory!

Such is the love of Christ! When we attempt to consider the glory of His divine person, the depth of His humiliation, the unknown sorrows and agonies which wrung His heart in Gethsemane, and on Golgotha; and that He endured all this for His enemies, even for those whose hearts were, both by nature and habit, alienated from Him; the power He exerts in reconciling them to Himself; the blessings He bestows upon them in this life, when they are renewed by His grace; and the eternal happiness He has prepared for them in the eternal state—I say, when we attempt to conceive of this love, in its origin, progress, and effects—we are soon overwhelmed, our thoughts are swallowed up, and we can only wonder and adore in silence!

This love of Christ to sinners is inexpressible, unsearchable and unfathomable! It is an ocean without either bottom or shore! "May you experience the love of Christ—though it is so great you will never fully understand it!" Ephesians 3:19

Those who have obtained mercy, who know and love and trust Him, have their special and appropriate reasons for admiring His love. They often reflect on what they once were, and where they were going—when He first touched their hearts; and made them willing to receive Him as their Prophet, Priest and King. They are sensible, that, if they had died in their ignorance and sins, they must have

been lost forever! And, while they see many of their fellow-creatures, no worse by nature than themselves, who live in the world, without God, and without Christ, and who die without any solid ground of hope—they rejoice, with trembling, for that undeserved and unsought mercy, which preserved them from going down into the pit of destruction, when their sins were unpardoned, and their hearts unhumbled! They confess that they were *barren trees* in God's vineyard; and, though he had a right to expect fruit from them, and waited year after year—He found none. Why then were they not cut down as cumberers of the ground? It was owing to the gracious interposition of the Great Mediator, whom they had long disregarded.

Thus, as we have observed, it was with our apostle. The pride of his heart, and the prejudices of his education, had fired him with rage against the cause and the people of the Lord. He seems to have been no less active and furious in opposing them, than Herod. But Herod was suddenly cut off, and devoured by worms; whereas Saul of Tarsus, who had done much mischief, while planning more, was suddenly convinced, humbled, and pardoned. We cannot wonder that the love of Christ was the constraining motive of his conduct from that time to the end of His life.

Oh, that we all knew the need and the worth of this Savior! Then we would all love him! This will be the deciding point at last. Paul, writing by inspiration of God, says, in one place, "Grace be with all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Ephesians 6:24) In another place, under the same influence, he denounces a dreadful sentence against those who love him not— "If anyone does not love the Lord—that person is *cursed!*" (1 Corinthians 16:22) This was by no means the apostle's wish; he would willingly have been made a curse himself (Romans 9:3) if he could thereby procure the salvation

of his enemies who sought his life in every place. But he declared the will of God, that if any man, who hears, or might hear, the record that God has given of his Son, refuses to love and serve him, and lives and dies a stranger to his love—he must, he will, be accursed! for,

2. He is the One, the mighty One, who died for all. The Old Testament *sacrifices*, which were types of his appearance in the fullness of time to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself—were appropriated for the instruction and consolation of the people of Israel. But now the partition-wall is broken down. The distinction between Jew and Gentile is removed. Jesus died, that all, of every age and nation, whether high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, who, to the ends of the earth, and to the end of time, would believe in his name, might live through him. As the sun, his great visible emblem, fills every eye with his light, and would do so, were they as numerous as the leaves upon the trees, or the blades of grass in the fields, without the least diminution of his effulgence; so this Lord God, our Savior, the Sun of the moral world, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Wherever the Word of his gospel is known, he makes it his power to the salvation of all who believe on him.

The value and efficacy of his atonement and righteousness are inexhaustible. It is true, the blind are in darkness at noon-day; but this Sun of Righteousness not only affords light to those who can see—but gives sight to the *blind*. He invites all to come to him for relief; but many refuse to apply. They prefer darkness to light, because their deeds are evil. But all who seek him, and wait for him, in the way of his appointment, are graciously accepted; they receive their sight; they look to him—and are saved. He has declared, Him that comes, I will never cast out, whatever their former characters or conduct may have been; but those, who, though repeatedly wooed and warned,

will not come, if they persist in their obstinacy, must perish in unbelief; for he is the Sovereign in the dispensation of his grace.

If this One, the only-beloved Son of God, died thus for all; if the Lord of Glory humbled himself to assume our nature, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; it surely must be for some very important design, worthy of himself, and which he alone was able to accomplish. The apostle briefly states the necessity and urgency of the case, by way of inference—If one died for all—**then were all dead**. The Scripture abundantly declares the state of fallen man, of all mankind, to be a state of **death**. We are all, by nature, dead in a two-fold sense, dead in LAW, and dead in sin.

When a criminal has been tried, convicted, and condemned to death in a court of justice, we speak of him as a *dead man*, though the sentence is not yet executed, and the king has the prerogative of pardoning him, if he is pleased to exercise mercy. We indeed compare great things with small, when we attempt to illustrate the proceedings of God with men, by the usages which obtain among ourselves; yet, in some respects, they are often appropriate, and the Scripture teaches us by them.

As we are rational creatures, capable of knowing our Maker, and our dependence upon him for life, and breath, and all things; we are bound to love God with all our hearts, to devote our strength, power, and faculties to his service, to obey his commands, to avoid whatever is contrary to his known will, to believe his promises, and to seek our happiness in his favor. This is the law of our nature, it is indeed the law of all created intelligences, whether angels or men. When God created man upright, in his own image, this obedience and submission, and a disposition to seek his supreme delight in his Maker, were as natural to him as it is for a fish to swim, or a bird to

fly. But this law we have broken. We are now depraved, and fallen from our original righteousness. We are now in a state of rebellion against God. We renounce his authority, violate his commands, are governed by our own will, and seek our own pleasure and glory, distinct from, and in opposition to, the will and glory of our Creator! The law which we have broken is holy, just, and good; (Romans 7:12) and, therefore, the sentence of condemnation denounced against the transgressors is righteous. We come into the world devoid of all real goodness, and with a propensity to every evil. The carnal *mind* is enmity against God. The *heart* of man, of all mankind universally, is deceitful and desperately wicked; the *thoughts* of men, when compared with God's holy law, are evil, only evil, and that continually. (Romans 8:7, Jer. 17:9, Genesis 6:5) Thus we are in a state of condemnation; by nature, children of wrath. But we, through the mercy and long-suffering of God, are favored with a respite. The just sentence is not yet executed; and the gospel points out a way of escape and deliverance. For this purpose God sent forth his Son, that whoever believes in him might be saved; but he who believed not is condemned already. (John 3:18)

We are likewise dead in SIN. We partake with the brute-creation in the animal life—but are highly distinguished from them by the rational life. There is likewise a spiritual life, of which our first parent was originally possessed—but he soon lost it. In this sense, when he sinned against God, he died instantly. Man still retains some marks of his pristine greatness; he is majestic though in ruins; he is alive as to the concerns of this world, and his attempts and success give indications of his native dignity—the sciences and the fine arts exhibit proofs of his genius and ability—he undertakes to measure the earth, to weigh the air, and almost to number and marshal the stars. What discoveries have been made in geometry, natural history, and chemistry! What powers are displayed in architecture, sculpture,

painting, poetry, and music! But, with respect to the concerns of his immortal soul, and the great realities of the unseen world, man, by nature, is dead as a stone. The dead body of Lazarus was not more incapable of performing the functions of common life than we, by nature, are of performing one spiritual act, or even of feeling one spiritual desire; until He, who, by his commanding word, raised Lazarus from the grave, (John. 11:43) is pleased, by the power of his Holy Spirit, to raise us from the death of sin unto a new life of righteousness. He, who, we profess to believe, will one day come to be our Judge, has assured us, that, except a man is born again, he cannot even see the kingdom of God. (John. 3:18). He has no faculty suited to the perception of what belongs either to the kingdom of *grace* upon earth, or what is revealed of the kingdom of *glory* in heaven. The result of his closest reasoning and shrewdest conjectures upon these subjects, leave him in utter ignorance and darkness. As no description can communicate an idea of *sunshine* or the *colors* of a rainbow to a man born blind—so the natural man cannot discern the things of God, for, they can only be spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

But Jesus died and rose again. As our Surety, he sustained the curse of the law to deliver us from condemnation; and, when he ascended on high to appear in the presence of God for us, he received gifts for rebellious man, eminently the gift of the Holy Spirit, that the Lord God might dwell among them. (Psalm 68:18) Thus the promise the Lord made by the Prophet Ezekiel is fulfilled, "I will place My Spirit within you and cause you to follow My statutes and carefully observe My ordinances." (Ezekiel 36:27) and then those who before were dead, begin to live!

A load of guilt and depravity lies unfelt upon the dead sinner; but, when he receives the principle of a new life, he groans, being

burdened. The eyes of his understanding are opened. New, and, until then, unthought-of objects press upon his notice. The views he now has of *God*, of *himself*, and of *eternity*, would overwhelm him, if he was not warranted and enabled to look to Jesus (Isaiah 45:22) as an all-sufficient and gracious Savior. From that hour he lives indeed; his sins are pardoned, his fears dispelled, his heart beats with love and gratitude. Old things are passed away, and all things are become new. He now lives no more to himself—but to Him who died for him and rose again.

3. This was what the apostle aimed at, and expected as the result and reward of His labors—that the love of Him who died for all, might constrain those who live, to live no more to themselves—but to Him.

When the sinner, who was too long governed by the base and narrow principle of *SELF*, is enabled to believe in Jesus for salvation, he feels the force of the apostle's words, "You are bought with a price, you are no longer your own; therefore glorify God with your body and your spirit which are his." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) This thought expands his *mind*—and elevates his *aims*. So far as his faith is in exercise, he is constrained by love, inspired by gratitude, and animated by confidence and hope, to live no more to himself—but to Him who loved him, and gave himself for him. He is now the devoted servant of his Lord, is governed by his precepts and example, and employs his time, talents, and influence, to promote the welfare of his fellow-creatures for the Lord's sake.

His new principles have this effect upon him—in whatever situation the providence of God places him. If he is *poor*, they teach him contentment, frugality, and industry. If he is *rich*, he is moderate, humble, and bountiful, and ready for every good work, either to

promote the knowledge of the gospel, or to relieve the necessitous. The golden, plain, and comprehensive rule, of *doing to others as he could reasonably wish others, in similar cases, would do unto him*, is inwrought into the very temper and habit of his mind. In a word, the true Christian, whether in public or in private life, whether a husband or a wife, a parent or a child, a master or a servant, whether possessed of rank and wealth, or appointed by the providence of God to sweep the street for his subsistence, in all stations and circumstances, is ambitious to let his light shine before men, for the honor of God, and to be filled with those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to his praise and glory!

Should these effects of the constraining love of Christ be disputed by people of any candor, degenerate as the present times are, we could refer them to living instances. We can point out to them, people, who once were a burden to themselves, a terror to their families, a nuisance in their connections, who, by receiving the truths of the gospel, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and by feeling the constraining love of Christ, are, in all these respects, become *new creatures*. And I little doubt that there are those now before me, to whom I may say, "Such were some of you—but you are washed—but you are sanctified—but you are justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11)

What shall we, then, say of the attempts of modern philosophers, so called, who, if they could prevail by spreading the gloomy sophisms of infidelity, would deprive mankind of that light and comfort of which the Holy Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is the only source. But, as the raging waves of the sea, in a storm, make no impression upon the rock against which they successively dash themselves into foam, and die away at its foot—so their most subtle, labored, and malignant efforts to suppress the glorious gospel of the

blessed God (1Ti. 1:11) will only issue in their own confusion. *Truth will triumph over all opposition!*

The church of God, composed of all the living members of that body of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the living head, is founded upon a rock, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail. There will always be a people, who, animated by a sense of the constraining love of Christ, will bear testimony to the power of his grace, and give evidence, by the general tenor of their conduct in life, their patience and peace in affliction, their love to their fellow creatures, and their joyful hopes of immortality when flesh and heart are fainting, that they have neither followed cunningly-devised fables, nor amused themselves with empty notions of truth.

My heart is too much impressed by the sight of this numerous and respectable auditory, and by my sincere regard for the true happiness of every individual before me, to permit me to conclude until I have addressed you on a subject of great concern. I am not preaching to Jews or Mohammedans—but to professed Christians. I am willing to take it for granted, that we all agree in acknowledging that the Scripture, the whole Scripture, is a revelation of the will of God. I hope there is not a person here, however immersed in the business, or drawn aside by the amusements and pleasures of the world, who, if he were asked to throw the Bible, with deliberation and contempt, into the fire, would not be shocked at the proposal. I think he would say, If I have not paid that attention to the Bible which it deserves—yet surely I am not so wicked and presumptuous as to burn it!

But permit me to ask you in love, If it is indeed the Word of God, why have you not paid that attention to it which it deserves? The same reasons which would deter you from willfully throwing it into the fire, should induce you to study it carefully, to make it the foundation

of your hope, and the rule of your life; for, if it is indeed the Word of God, it is the rule by which your characters will be decided, and your everlasting state fixed, according to the tenor of the gospel, which proclaims salvation to all who have repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to those alone.

It is painful to a holy mind—to observe how much the Bible is neglected. I have known some great houses in which this book could not be found. In others, if it has a place in the *library*, it is seldom removed from the shelf. Perhaps there is no book so little read, understood, or regarded—as the *book of God*, by multitudes who are willing to be called *Christians*. What an affront is this to the Almighty! A message from the king, or an act of parliament, engages the attention of those who are interested in the subject-matter; while the revealed will of God, our Creator, compared with whom all the kings, nations, and inhabitants of the earth, are but as a drop of water to the sea, or the small dust upon a balance—is treated with indifference; though every person who can have access to it, is deeply and equally interested in its contents!

Should there be but a few of my hearers, who, through their engagements and pursuits in life, have hitherto been remiss and negligent in acquainting themselves with the principal facts and truths recorded in the Bible—neither my *conscience* nor my *compassion* will permit me to close my discourse until I have briefly expostulated with them; as it is possible I may never have another opportunity, and perhaps the providence of God has brought them hither this morning for their good.

Whatever difference of opinion there may be among us in other respects, we are universally agreed as to the certainty of death—and the uncertainty of life. We are sure that we all must die; and, after

death, if the Scriptures be true, we must appear before God in judgment. Nor have we any warrant to assure ourselves that we shall live to the end of the present year, or even week! "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth!" (Proverbs 27:1) We often read or hear of sudden deaths, and sometimes of those, who, after a lingering illness, died as suddenly, to their own apprehensions of the event, as if they had died by a flash of lightning. It is no less a proof than a fruit of that *depravity* which the Scripture charges upon the whole human race—that men, who are so active and solicitous in managing the temporal, transient affairs of time, to promote what they conceive most to their advantage—should be totally indifferent to what may be their allotment in the unchangeable and eternal state!

Permit me briefly to remind you, that the Scripture concludes us all under sin, and exposed to the just displeasure of our Great Creator, Proprietor, Lawgiver, and Benefactor. He formed us for himself, and gave a thirst and capacity for happiness which only himself can satisfy. Our relation to Him, an intelligent creatures, who live, move, and have our being in Him, and cannot exist a moment without Him, binds us to love him supremely, to devote all our powers and faculties to his service. This is the law of our nature. This law we have broken; we all of us have lived too long, and some of us are still living without God in the world. We have made our own will and our own gratification, the rule and end of our conduct, instead of his will and glory. We have incurred the penalty annexed to the breach of this law. We are sinners, the wages of sin is death, and the extent of that sentence is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. How shall we escape? What shall we do to be saved?

To those who are sensible of their desert and danger, the gospel points out relief and a refuge. Jesus invites the weary and burdened sinner, and says, "Him that comes, I will never cast out." You have heard something of his glorious person, power, authority, and love. He is able, he is willing, he has promised to save to the uttermost, all who come to God by Him. Oh, that today you may hear his voice, and comply with his invitation! If you cordially receive the record which God has, by his own voice from heaven, given, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" He will, for his sake, be well pleased with you, if you approve of this way of salvation, in which justice and mercy harmonize, which ascribes all the glory to God, teaches us to hate sin, and inspires the love of holiness, as essential to happiness; then this Savior, and all the fullness of His salvation, will assuredly be yours! You will then renounce every other hope, you will no longer trust or boast in yourselves—but you will have a good warrant to boast and glory in your Savior, and to say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength. The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore I have everything I need. I need not fear. He will support me by His arm, cheer me with His presence, protect me by His power, guide me by His counsels, and afterwards receive me to glory!"

John Newton was born in London, England, July 24, 1725, and died there December 21, 1807. He occupied an unique position among the founders of the Evangelical School, due as much to the romance of his young life and the striking history of his conversion, as to his force of character. His mother, a pious Dissenter, stored his childish mind with Scripture, but died when he was seven years old. At the age of eleven, after two years' schooling, he went to sea with his father. His life at sea teems with wonderful escapes, vivid dreams and sailor recklessness. He grew into an abandoned and godless sailor. The *religious fits* of his boyhood, changed into *settled infidelity*, through the study of infidel writings, and the instruction of

one of his comrades. Disappointing repeatedly the plans of his father, he was flogged as a deserter from the navy, and for fifteen months lived, half-starved and ill-treated, in abject degradation under a slave-dealer in Africa. The one restraining influence of his life was his faithful love for his future wife, Mary Catlett, formed when he was seventeen, and she only in her fourteenth year.

A chance reading of Thomas à Kempis sowed the seed of his conversion; which quickened under the solemn contemplations of a night spent in steering a water-logged vessel in the face of apparent death in 1748. He was then twenty-three. The six following years, during which he commanded a slave ship, matured his Christian belief. Nine years more, spent chiefly at Liverpool, in fellowship with Whitefield, Wesley, and Nonconformists, in exercises of devotion and occasional preaching among the Dissenters, elapsed before his ordination to the *pastorate of Olney*, in 1764.

The *Olney period* was the most fruitful of his life. His zeal in pastoral visiting, preaching and prayer-meetings was unwearied. He formed his lifelong friendship with Cowper, and became the spiritual father of Thomas Scott the commentator. At Olney his best works—Omicron's Letters (1774); Olney Hymns (1779); Cardiphonia, published 1781—were composed. He later moved to London (1780-1807), in the center of the Evangelical movement, and his zeal was as ardent as before. In 1805, when no longer able to read his text, his reply when pressed to discontinue preaching, was, "*What, shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak!*"

The story of his sins and his conversion was the base of his influence; but it would have been little but for the vigor of his mind, his warm heart, Christian candor, tolerance, and piety. His renown as a *guide in experimental religion* made him the center of a host of inquirers,

with whom he maintained patient, loving, and judicious correspondence, of which a monument remains in his beautiful **letters**.

As a *hymn-writer*, his rich acquaintance with Scripture, knowledge of the heart, directness and force, and a vivid imagination, show strongly. His most characteristic hymns are those which depict in the language of intense humiliation his mourning for the abiding sins of his regenerate life, coincident with the never-failing conviction of acceptance in the Beloved. This feeling may be seen in the speeches, writings, and diaries of his whole life.

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