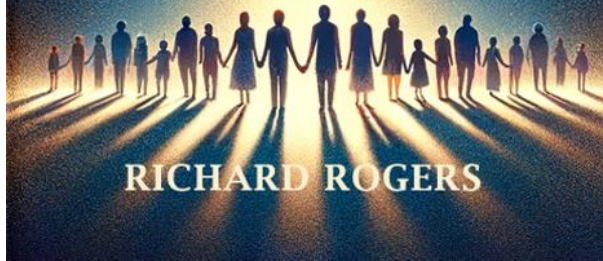


WHO  
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THE TRUE  
CHILDREN  
OF  
GOD?



RICHARD ROGERS

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RICHARD ROGERS

# Who are the True Children of God?

PENNED BY RICHARD ROGERS, PREACHER OF the word of God  
at Wethersfield in Essex.

DEVT. 33. verse. 12. The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety  
with him, who protecteth him all the day long.

PSAL. 84. verse. 10. One day in thy Courts is better than a thousand  
others elsewhere.

AT LONDON, Imprinted by FELIX KYNGSTON, for THOMAS MAN,  
and ROBERT DEXTER, and are to be sold at the Brazen Serpent in  
Paul's Churchyard. 1603.

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## **CHAP. 1.**

### **The Sum and Order of this First Treatise.**

Although my chief purpose is to direct the true Christian, who is already a believer, in how to walk daily through the course of this life in such a way that they may find a very sweet and effectual taste of eternal happiness, even here (which few think can be obtained), yet I have thought it meet: first, to show who true believers are, the children of God, and how men are brought into this state, so they may know that they are. Partly for those who desire guidance in a Christian life, that they may have this ready at hand to show them that they are the Lord's, notwithstanding many doubts raised by Satan against them, and that others may learn to know it, who are yet ignorant, as without this knowledge, their pursuit of a godly life would be in vain. This is the weightiest and chiefest point of all in divinity and the foundation of the rest that I have undertaken to address. Therefore, it must be dealt with the utmost regard, whether we consider those who explain and elucidate it or those who seek instruction and persuasion in its truth.

Our corrupt nature, slowness of heart to believe, and Satan's subtlety often deceive us, especially regarding the assurance of salvation. Many thousands believe that no one can know they belong to the Lord while living in this world, or have any assurance of His favor until their death, unless revealed to them specially. This is the error of the Papists. On the other hand, many think that this question is not so difficult, and anyone who professes the gospel should not doubt their salvation, even though our Savior Christ said that His flock is small, and in comparison, only a few will be saved. This is the opinion of our common Protestants, who may say "Lord, Lord" but

are not prepared to do the will of the Lord, and are therefore far from entering the Kingdom of heaven.

Additionally, many poor, ignorant souls believe that as long as they do well and serve God, they can be assured of their redemption through Christ. However, if they are hindered from pleasing God, even by mere frailty and the corruption of nature, they feel they can have no hold on it. This uncertainty, though it affects many who are dear to the Lord, must be considered an error and sin. They need a more settled judgment than this to either believe in the changeableness of God or become their own enemies by allowing this error to make their lives uncomfortable and depriving themselves of the assurance of God's love, which is the strongest motivation for true godliness.

These are just a few of the many doubts and erroneous opinions on this matter, as will become evident later. To resolve them, although many things must be said, the essence can be clearly and soundly expressed in a few words.

In order for many, including those who have received this doctrine, to understand how different God's thoughts are from man's and to have this doctrine before their eyes daily in an easy and familiar manner, I will, to the best of my ability, set down what is expedient for this point. I have thought it good to categorize this into three parts. First, to explain how one may come to know that they are the child of God and how God works this through His Spirit in the hearts of those who are His. Second, how weak believers may support themselves in temptation, recognizing that they differ from those who are not the Lord's. Third, how they may more easily prove they have true faith, confirm and preserve it, and understand how desirable such a state is.

For the clear explanation of the first point, three things must be addressed. First, the clear knowledge of man's misery. Second, his redemption and deliverance from it. Third, how both of these should affect their hearts and what fruit they will bear through the operation of the Holy Spirit in those who shall be saved. This means that the knowledge of misery will wound and humble their hearts when they see that they are but dead and damned people. The knowledge of redemption will heal the sores of their hearts and lift them up again, allowing them to behold all their sins pardoned and their woe removed as if they had never been burdened by it. This will be supplemented with a discussion of the hindrances to faith and the desire from which it originates.

## **CHAP. 2.**

### **Of Man's Misery.**

To begin with man's misery and briefly discuss it, no one should think that this was the state in which God originally created Adam, the father of all the world, or his posterity that was within him.

Surely, it was not so with mankind in the beginning. God created all things good, and man, among other creatures, was made holy and happy, the lord of all the creatures on earth, little inferior to the angels. He was endowed with infinite blessings, full of beauty and glory. Even though it might be seen that the only thing lacking was complete freedom from losing this blessed state, the devil found an

opportunity to deceive him and his descendants, casting them from the happy condition they once enjoyed.

However, if this had been the only harm that mankind suffered due to the malice of the devil, it would have been little compared to what befell them. Besides losing their felicity, they were plunged into extreme misery and desolation. This misery consisted of two main aspects:

Firstly, mankind always and in all things offends God, unable to do anything that pleases Him, as their hearts are always evil.

Secondly, mankind is odious to God and justly cursed by Him. Mans' sin is not just the transgression of Adam in his unnatural and treacherous rebellion and disobedience, for which he is rightly guilty with Adam and shares the consequences. There is another aspect of sin that arises from this, namely, the infection of all the powers and members of both the soul and body. This corruption or concupiscence, which spread over Adam's descendants through his first sin, poisons his entire nature. There is no sound part in him from head to toe. Consequently:

- The understanding, even the most excellent power of the mind, is filled with blindness and darkness, unable to grasp the things of God.
- The conscience is wounded, seared, or defiled in some way and never at peace.
- The memory forgets good things entirely or remembers neither good nor evil correctly, as experience forces even the best to complain.
- The will is captive and lacks the strength to do good, but it has the ability to do evil.



- Therefore, man is carried away by his affections, like a chariot on its wheels, towards what displeases God.

What more can I say? Who can help but lament such a distressed and woeful state of the human soul? At one time, it was fashioned in the image of God, in true holiness and righteousness, and now it is devoid of that grace and filled with all the filthiness of sin and uncleanness.

Unfortunately, who would believe or consent to the truth that man, who holds such a high opinion of himself, is indeed so far from what he dreams of and is in such bondage and slavery, seemingly farthest from any part of it?

To continue, if his conduct and way of life, which are the untimely fruit of this bitter root, were laid bare (which I will only briefly touch upon), it would make even the person who thinks themselves most innocent appear most vile and loathsome in their own eyes. They would be ashamed of themselves and want to hide in a dungeon where no one could see them.

Speaking of the actions of the mind, what are their thoughts about heavenly matters but errors, falsehoods, and lies? What are the wishes and desires of their hearts but earthly and fleshly, one degree above another? They are led away by their concupiscence, enticed, consent, defend, and harden themselves.

What about outward behavior but a surrender of the members of the body as instruments and weapons of sin, including sins of the tongue and sins in their way of life? In every way and in all things, they are excessively sinful. Even though Paul lived according to the strictest order of the Pharisees, which was in appearance far above many others, after his conversion, he could say, "I was a blasphemer, an

oppressor, a persecutor." Thus, it is most certainly true that no one can be obedient to God's law and can do nothing but sin.

The sins of man are as numerous as the hairs on his head and the sand on the seashore—innumerable. Even his best actions, such as his prayers, are no better than abominable before God, as Solomon speaks: "He that turneth his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abominable." It is not imagined by thousands that such evidence can be brought against the inhabitants of the earth, even the unworthy sons of men, who were once, by creation, the sons of God. Even the most ungodly individuals, as can be heard of, will have some goodness in them. This is why they would never agree with the notion that their entire lives are sinful. Thus, it's no wonder that people think of themselves as they do, each one fleeing to the shelter of believing they are not the worst among others.

To clearly lay open these sins in detail, one must examine God's law through each commandment, though I will only briefly touch upon it here. I will provide a more comprehensive view of it in another place.

However, all this sin that rules and reigns in man, making him not much different from the devils themselves, is only one part of the misery he is in, and in the eyes and judgment of those who are the majority in the world, it is the lesser of the two.

The other part of this misery is that, because of this sin, man is subject to all the fearful and horrible plagues that God has threatened and executes in the world upon the committers of these sins. He is also subject to the endless punishment of condemnation in the world to come, which is the principal and most just desert of every sin. The particular vexations and calamities that belong to sinners in this life are innumerable and cannot be fully expressed. However, it is appropriate to mention some of them for the sake of

understanding, as many thousands never even dream of such matters.

Firstly, just as the curse of God is upon all creatures for man's sake, it is beyond doubt that it is also cast upon man himself. Thus, wherever he goes or whatever he does, the wrath and anger of God follow and accompany him. He is cursed in the field and cursed in the house, cursed in his basket and in his store. Moses speaks of the earth, saying, "Cursed is the earth for your sake; thorns and briers it shall bring forth to you." This results in scarcities, famines, poverty, and want, which are cried out everywhere. In his body, he suffers from sickness, various diseases, aches, pains, swellings, burstings, and other intolerable afflictions. In his senses, there are deafness, blindness, numbness, and similar conditions that would make anyone tremble to hear them mentioned. As for friends and family, wife and children, father and mother, or whatever might bring pleasure to man, how can they delight his heart soundly or be pleasant when they are mixed with this curse? The Lord curses them; He will bring judgment for them, even for enjoying them without the right or lawful liberty, as they do not belong to man but to Christ, who is the heir and Lord of all. If there were a sword hanging point downward over a man's head while he was sitting at a royal banquet, what pleasure could he take in the variety of his delicacies? Yet it is a different manner of slaying when a man must be constantly constrained by fear to remember and think about it, as if the sword would take his soul at any moment.

However, this does not affect men's hearts as it should, as they often raise objections to quench the force and heat of this truth. They argue that not all men are in this miserable state, except for a few who are weary of their lives and make all their other delights unpleasant. This unwise objection arises because people are moved

only by what they see with their outward eyes, and they do not allow the voice of God to penetrate their hearts. Nevertheless, God's pronouncement is the same for those who escape all these afflictions, if any such could be found, as it is for those who have been plagued by them all. It applies to everyone without respect of persons: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth because they have sinned!" As long as this word remains true, no one's condition is better than another's; all are under the wrath of God. Therefore, let no one deceive themselves, for God cannot be mocked. We will see later how this should affect the heart of those who hear it. But those who harden their hearts because they do not feel or see such things will surely come to evil.

I have not yet spoken of the plagues and punishments that take hold upon the soul, which are even more fearful than those of the body, if they could be as easily discerned. To be given up to one's own vile lusts, like a brute beast wallowing in filthiness, when one could have shined as an angel in goodness—is there anyone of judgment who would not count this among the most dreadful judgments? To be utterly darkened and deprived of the true knowledge of God and the afterlife (the knowledge of which is the beauty of the world), and to be hastening toward endless woe without even understanding it—what greater part of misery can there be in this world? To be so hardened in heart as to be past all feeling and remorse, to fall into utter desperation without hope of recovery by anything one can do—such madness, frenzy, and heaps of the like—can anything be thought more full of horror? All these afflictions befall woeful man. There is none who has not brought himself into the depths of them all, which is all, I may say truly, that he has to boast of. Thus, it cannot be denied that he is miserable. To add as the closing to all this the remediless fears and deep doubts, which often bring anguish here, the pains and torture of both soul and body at the end of this

life, when both must take up their dwelling in hell—whoever hears of it must confess that there is no part of misery lacking. However, since the Scripture itself calls it "pain unspeakable," I will not attempt to describe it, lest I should in any way seem to diminish its severity. It is sufficient for this purpose that it is most extreme, without relief, and never-ending. I have now explained man's misery and both its parts as I intended, in as few sentences as I could, even fewer than such a weighty matter might have required, but it has been addressed in detail by others elsewhere. I have decided not to dwell any further on these matters, as they have been thoroughly expounded by many learned brethren in a well-ordered manner.

Knowledge of these two aspects of man's misery is an essential part of God's truth for the one whom the Lord intends to save. For the one who does not know this swells with pride, becomes complacent, and cannot do otherwise as long as they remain ignorant of this point. Therefore, the Lord leads them, whom He intends to show mercy, to the preaching of His Word, particularly His law, which reveals their sin and damnation. They shall clearly understand it and realize that they are just as much under its power as anyone else.

At this point, I find it appropriate to add this: since ignorant people who still live in their sins harden their hearts when they hear of this, none have just cause to quarrel with the Lord. If anything spoken in this discussion displeases them, they have only themselves to blame. However, they should be infinitely grateful that God has brought this hidden secret to light among them. This way, they can see the impending plague and avoid it, being awakened from the present danger they are in. Furthermore, they should understand that God does not permit His ministers, who proclaim this message of man's woeful condition, to deliver it plainly and starkly, preaching only the law. Instead, they are to combine the glad tidings of the Gospel with

it in their ministry, preaching forgiveness of sins alongside the call to repentance and by pricking the people's hearts with terror and sorrow for their sins, as our Savior, John the Baptist, and other faithful servants did. Just as none can believe without repentance, none can repent without belief.

Therefore, having explained in the previous point how the knowledge of one's miserable condition must be preached to the one who will be saved, I will now show that it is most fitting to present other doctrine to the one who has learned the former: specifically, to proclaim joyful and glad tidings of a full and sufficient remedy against all such misery. Without this remedy, how intolerable would the condition of such a person be?

## **CHAP. 3.**

Of the knowledge of redemption and deliverance.

This remedy, therefore, I will first present, and then I will explain how God intends for one to understand and know it. When one is enlightened to know the will of God both in the misery of man and in his redemption, they may, as God has ordained, have both aspects work harmoniously within them. Thus, they come to know themselves as the children of God and heirs of salvation. Without some knowledge of both, no one is either properly humbled or exalted. Although many may know both aspects, some even able to teach them to others, they may still not fully benefit from either. However, none can be saved without the knowledge of both. The

essence of all that must be known about this is contained in this concise statement: Christ Jesus, as preached and revealed in the Gospel, is salvation for all who believe. This is more explicitly expressed in the words of Saint John: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Likewise, Saint Paul affirmed: "This is a true saying, and by all means worthy to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

From these passages, as well as many others that fully and plainly declare this remedy, four aspects should be considered: First, what it is and wherein it consists; Second, by whom it is achieved; Third, how it is brought to light and revealed; Fourth, how it is received and embraced. Concerning the first aspect, the only sufficient remedy for the salvation of man is to satisfy God's justice, which has been violated by sin. Without this satisfaction, God's wrath cannot be appeased, nor His favor obtained. Consequently, there can be no redemption. It is crucial to maintain the perfect justice of God, for He would not be perfectly just if He were to alter the righteous sentence of His law, which pronounces every transgressor cursed and only the perfect keeper of the law blessed. Thus, God's justice is satisfied through two means: First, by enduring the punishment due to sin, which is the curse of God; Second, by perfectly keeping the law, for without this, there can be no deliverance from sin and condemnation. Clearly, the remedy for our misery lies outside of ourselves and is not found in any other creature. Neither we nor any other creature is capable of bearing the curse, let alone overcoming it. Similarly, it is impossible for flesh to perfectly fulfill the law. This undermines the foundation of Popery and any belief in merit or any human contribution to justification.

Regarding the second point, the question of by whom this remedy is obtained: This remedy, which could not be acquired by any other means, is appointed by the Father, undertaken and accomplished by Christ, and sealed in the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit. It is exclusively and wholly realized in Jesus Christ, who is both God and man. Being perfect God, He assumed our human nature and, in both natures, became a most merciful Mediator between His Father and us, reconciling us to Him. He endured the full weight of God's curse due to our sin by the power of His divinity, thereby overcoming it. He also fulfilled the law on our behalf, satisfying God's justice entirely. Therefore, it is entirely accurate to say that salvation is found in no one else, and in Him alone is the complete remedy for the misery of mankind to be found. As the Holy Spirit attests: "There is given no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved." As Saint John states: "Whoever has the Son has life, and he who has not the Son has not life." To sum it up: if anyone were to ask how Christ's redemption becomes the possession of man, they should understand that God the Father, out of His marvelous love, freely gave Christ, as He had long promised, along with His entire work of redemption. As the Apostle asserts: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Thus, anyone who believes in Him shall no longer remain under God's wrath and perish but shall have everlasting life. Christ is given to us by His Father to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). Since God alone has brought this supreme remedy to humanity through Christ, against the intolerable woe that sin has brought upon the world and has overwhelmed all, the practitioners of Popery may be ashamed and embarrassed. They attempt to share the glory between Christ and creatures, failing to attribute the entire work of our salvation to Christ alone.



The third aspect to consider is how this divine mystery and secret is revealed. In the peaceful and flourishing state of Christ's Church, this revelation comes through the glorious Gospel. This Gospel, described by Saint Paul as the power of salvation for all who believe, contains the most valuable and welcomed message of man's complete redemption through Jesus Christ. Its purpose is to reveal the righteousness in Christ, through which the entire law is fully satisfied, and salvation is attained. When faithfully preached and proclaimed by God's messengers and ministers, especially the part about mankind being fully redeemed by the blood of Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son of God incarnate, it brings great and exceeding joy. Those who understand its value and price welcome it with open arms. Though it was taught less clearly under the law in types and shadows, foreshadowing the coming of Christ to be revealed, it is now proclaimed far more plainly and clearly under the Gospel. It can now be said that Christ has been crucified in our eyes through this preaching, making the mystery of salvation, purchased by His death, manifest to us.

Now, the fourth point to address is how this message of Christ delivering man from the fear of the wrath to come is received in the world, and that is through faith. There is no other way to receive Christ and all His merits, the complete remedy for man's misery, except through faith. True faith, known as justifying faith due to its worthy effect, is nothing more than a firm belief in the promise of life. It is the belief that when poor sinners come to Christ, He will ease them, freeing them from all misery and restoring them to eternal happiness. In short, it is to trust in God's word to save him. This genuine faith is brought about through the ministry of the word, which reveals God's mercy and truth. The Holy Spirit, by illuminating and drawing the individual to believe, unites them to

Christ. Those who have received this faith become children of God and inheritors, with the sure hope of eternal life.

Thus, it is essential for one to understand that they must possess knowledge of both man's misery and God's mercy through Christ's redemption before they can enjoy salvation as their own or have a part in it. They must firmly believe that God has made Christ Jesus His Son, Lord over all creation, conqueror of the devil, liberator of captives, and comforter of the afflicted. Through Him, full forgiveness of sins has been procured, just as Adam's sin brought guiltiness and condemnation. These are the first two points that must be known by the one whom God will effectually call to the assurance of salvation.

## **CHAP. 4.**

How this knowledge works, particularly the first step where God makes them believe their misery and become troubled in mind over it.

There is still the need for the true embracing and application of Christ, along with all the merits of His death and passion, to the individual who possesses the aforementioned knowledge. Without this, they cannot find happiness. Let us now explore how this knowledge operates within such a person, upon whom God intends to bestow His mercy. We will see how God, through the light and aid of this knowledge, leads them until they believe personally and for themselves—something that those who possess only general

knowledge never achieve. This is the final aspect I intended to address regarding this matter, which is to reveal who truly is a child of God. Once this is accomplished, the question at hand shall become evident.

By the way, it is worth mentioning once more that anyone lacking this knowledge of their own misery and the remedy, has no way to reach the kingdom of heaven. Such people, though they have the least troubled consciences and live merrily, believing no danger looms over them, ought to be pitied, prayed for, and encouraged to hear the preached word, rather than being allowed to persist in their folly. They embody the truth of the saying by the Wise Man: "There is a way that seems pleasant to them, but the end leads to death." God permits them, as He did the Gentiles, to walk in their own ways.

Now, to leave those individuals, who are sufficiently convinced of their woeful state even by the testimony of people with sound judgment, and proceed with the matter at hand—to demonstrate how this doctrine operates in those who, through it, come to true faith and confident hope of salvation—we must understand that they do not remain idle and unprofitable hearers, as some do. Instead, they are secretly drawn, they know not how, by the incredible work of the Spirit of God. They are persuaded that the taught doctrine concerns them personally, and the Lord grants them wisdom, a gift of the Spirit, enabling them to apply general truths to their specific situation. Through this, they believe that God speaks to them just as He does to others when pronouncing the threats of the law and eternal damnation. Their eyes are now opened to believe this, and they consider themselves the most miserable of all. Previously, they cared nothing for the well-being of their souls, assuming they were in good standing with God just like everyone else. However, they now perceive themselves as not only loathsome in God's sight due to the

leprosy of sin but also as cursed and damned individuals, subject to God's plagues in this world and condemnation in the world to come. Although the world lies in darkness, refusing to believe the law of God for fear of conviction (and therefore being unable to believe the promises of the Gospel), God provides for His own. By recognizing the consequences of their sins and feeling the weight of their guilt, they develop a desire to seek mercy and forgiveness, which would otherwise seem unappealing. As our Savior, Christ, said, "The whole have no need of the physician, but the sick" (Matthew 9:12). Therefore, let this profound impact of the preached doctrine of the law not be considered a trivial or common mercy. While it may be undervalued due to the commonplace nature of its teaching, it is indeed a remarkable blessing. For just as it is said of faith in Luke 18:8, that when the Son of Man comes, He will find it rare in the world, we may also say of this: it is rare for people to truly believe, upon knowing that all are under God's wrath until the Son of God sets them free, that this is their own predicament.

Oh, men shun this knowledge as if it were death itself, and yet without believing it, there is no life. For if they were to believe it personally, for their own sake, they could not help but take it to heart. It would consume their thoughts entirely, just as one is overcome by sudden and heavy news. All the faculties of their mind and heart would be affected by it, like a man stung by an adder or pierced by the point of a sword. That's how it is with someone who genuinely believes in their own misery, casting aside all delusions that might hinder this realization. Such a belief would bring about a sudden transformation, no matter how far they were from it before.

This transformation is vividly illustrated by the example of the three thousand people who were converted by Peter's sermon. They had previously been among those who crucified Christ, and at that very

moment, they mocked and ridiculed the apostles, accusing them of being drunk with new wine. However, when the Lord, through the power of His Word and Peter's skillful handling of it, arrested them and struck their hearts with spiritual swords, they were pricked in their hearts as if an arrow had pierced their liver. They immediately cried out in intolerable pain, expressing it to those they had recently mocked. They began to speak in new tongues, saying, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Similarly, the Lord works when He makes people believe His thundering voice through His law, arraigning them for their sins. This experience is as fearful to them as the roar of a lion, even though others, whose sins are just as great and who have every reason to be fearful and weighed down by them, remain unmoved. They are not moved, I say, because the familiarity of it is akin to how birds are unafraid of a scarecrow after becoming accustomed to it. Birds may even perch on its head and pluck straw from its nose without fear.

I emphasize this point because I have observed, through long experience, how easily people in our age allow themselves to be deceived in this matter. It is quite lamentable that the majority, who are easily healed if they are pricked at all, and who react with rage toward the minister if their hearts are troubled by hearing about their danger, are a minority. There is a much larger group who have never experienced a troubled conscience due to their sin or the woe it has brought upon them. They do not even conceive that such an experience is necessary for them. They eat, drink, sleep, play, and work without a care. They embrace this present evil world, living in profanity and merriment, even though, as S. James says, they should be howling and mourning. They seem carefree and lighthearted, and they do not become frightened until the very moment of death or when they face mortal danger. But what do they do then? After indulging themselves, living for pleasure, and enjoying their lives,

what happens when they see their reckoning and the day of judgment approaching? Their mirth disappears, and they die as fools, like Nabal, who turned into a stone at the news of his impending death. Some despair, like Judas, and some die prematurely, even though they loved their lives dearly. The best of them are like those described by the prophet, dying without bonds, meaning they die quietly. Perhaps they utter a plea for mercy, but since they did not seek blessings in their life, blessings remain far from them at their death. Therefore, dying without repentance, they must be feared by others.

Yet, in a world filled with such people, it is astonishing that this unpleasant and dangerous speech is spread far and wide among them, often by ministers and common individuals alike. They cry out that it is a pity some are allowed to preach the law, claiming that the strictness of their consciences is enough to drive people to despair, and so on. However, S. Paul commands that the word be preached with all authority, which no one can resist, and that it should convict the conscience. In the Acts of the Apostles, S. Luke praises the effect of this doctrine so highly, stating that people were pricked in their hearts for their sins. Without this experience, they would neither have repented nor obtained forgiveness for their sins. Indeed, if anyone preaches the law alone without the good news of the Gospel or urges repentance without the comfort of God's mercy through Christ and the forgiveness of sins, they should be sternly rebuked and restrained until they correct this dangerous error. However, if someone finds fault with the combination of both aspects in preaching, despite the evidence from experience and Scripture that no other form of preaching is effective and beneficial for the Church, they should be earnestly instructed. If their objections stem from ignorance, they should be taught; if from a more sinister motive, they should desist from their course. This should suffice as a response to

this hasty and unwise criticism, which may cause many to stumble. Returning to the main point from which I digressed briefly, I implore those who are willing to learn that God often uses His law to humble those whom He intends to exalt, as I mentioned before.

The Scriptures contain numerous complaints and cries from God's servants who acknowledged their wretchedness. Some made these acknowledgments after escaping the perils of their past sins, as evident in Paul's letter to Timothy where he confessed, "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an oppressor." Others cried out during their times of distress, like Ephraim's plea in Jeremiah, "Convert me, O Lord, or else I cannot be converted," or those in 1 Samuel 1:12, 20, and many more. Thanks be to God, although these individuals are but a few among the countless who have lived in past ages, many in our own time have not left this experience unspoken. Some have departed this life, while others still walk among us today. They have confessed their deep woe with bitter complaints, salty tears, and mournful groans, no less sensibly than Jacob's sorrow when he believed a wild beast had devoured his son Joseph (Genesis 37:34). They sought relief and deliverance, although most remain hardened and cannot be brought to such humility.

If what I've said on this matter doesn't persuade people to think along these lines, and it is less believed and regarded, especially when many, including great sinners, are as cheerful or at least as far from any wounds or stings of conscience as anyone could imagine, it's important to understand that this is the case for some because they neither know nor believe it. They are steeped in ignorance and unbelief, and as a result, they neither suspect nor fear such a thing. This condition is the reality for all the world until they come to know it through the law. Paul himself attests to this when he says in Romans 7:8, "I once was alive before the Law," indicating that he

believed himself to be in perfect safety. Ignorance and unbelief are the reasons why what I've described lies dormant, unnoticed, and unfelt by a man of a thousand. This situation is exacerbated by the incompetence and negligence of ministers, who, as the Lord's watchmen, should awaken their congregants from their deep and deadly slumber. Instead, they often soothe the wounds of God's people with comforting words, falsely declaring, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14). For those who have been wisely taught and earnestly guided by their faithful teachers, a different outcome can be observed. Many among them possess knowledge and belief in these matters, which exposes the spiritual blindness and bondage of the rest—nearly the entire world—those who would scoff and mock at this doctrine, attempting to persuade others that it does not exist. But I have lingered on this topic for a while now. I will proceed to the next point and continue to explain how God works in those He intends to save, once He has brought them this far.

### **The second work: they consult in this case what to do.**

After a person realizes, through the teachings they have received, that they stand guilty before God, facing eternal punishment and divine wrath, and can't see a way to escape this impending doom, the Lord guides their heart towards further contemplation of their current situation. They begin to consult within themselves about what actions to take in this desperate condition. This process is not taken lightly or superficially, as many might do after hearing the necessity of this duty explained and urged upon them. Instead, they engage in it with utmost seriousness, as if their very life depended on it.



It is beyond question that God moves them to deliberate in such a weighty and uncertain situation, as nothing worthwhile is accomplished without due consideration, even in earthly matters where human intellect is the primary or sole agent. Rashness rarely leads to success; hence, it is reasonable to assume that God would not allow someone He intends to honor with the assured hope of salvation to act without careful thought and consideration, especially when He uses ordinary means that are readily available.

The fact that they engage in consultations about what to do becomes evident through the Prophet Jeremiah's complaint. When the people were called to repentance, and the Prophet waited to see the fruit of their response, none of them seemed to say, "What have I done?" This implies that they did not enter into serious consideration of the matter. The parable of the prodigal son, who closely resembles the sinner and, in his return to his father, represents the penitent sinner turning to God, demonstrates this point. Before coming to his senses, he considered and deliberated on his situation when he realized he was starving while even the hired servants in his father's house had enough bread to eat.

Likewise, the steward, when warned to give an account of his stewardship, pondered what to do. Furthermore, we see in the examples of the godly who had fallen that they could not repent until they remembered and considered their fall, as observed in the case of the Church of Ephesus and Peter before he wept bitterly, recalling the words of Jesus and his transgressions against them. All these instances indicate that God leads His people to consult about their condition when they are in anguish and distress of mind.

If they cannot counsel themselves, the Lord directs them to seek advice from others, as illustrated in the aforementioned examples

from the Book of Acts and the Samaritan woman. We can surmise that God influences their thoughts on this matter, similar to how other individuals in the Scriptures have expressed their experiences. They contemplate what actions to take, whether there is hope, how they ended up in this condition, the losses they have incurred due to their estrangement from God while pursuing their own will and foolish liberty. They realize that their cursed path has come to an end, and the little time remaining will pass quickly. The pleasures, jests, merry thoughts, dreams, and vain hopes they once indulged in have all faded, and they are ashamed to acknowledge the deceivable nature of those pleasures. As for safety and true peace, they understand how distant these are from their current state. They also recognize that their past life will be held to account, and though they may think of excuses, delays, or other vain attempts to deceive themselves, they are aware that these cannot erase the painful awareness of their woeful condition, especially considering that God will not be mocked, and His word has exposed their misery.

He will, therefore, no longer consult with flesh and blood as he has done in the past. He puts away all fleshly and carnal strategies and crutches. By God's gracious direction, he seeks counsel based on the knowledge he has acquired. He realizes that no one can come to Christ unless the heavenly Father draws them by His Spirit. Therefore, even though the sorrow of hypocrites may fade away and come to nothing, God's gracious working in him turns it into an opportunity for humbling and breaking his heart, leading to many other positive outcomes, as we shall see later. He also ponders the fact that God is slow to anger and ready to forgive sinners, being gracious and full of mercy. Although this thought may be pushed aside due to the remembrance of the enormity of his sin and unfamiliarity with the promise, it still secretly sustains him and prevents him from descending into dreadful despair.

So, while immediate comfort may elude him, he continues to sorrow, even more deeply, because he genuinely believes he has no share in it. Consequently, as that avenue of comfort is temporarily closed off, he can't help but return to thoughts of his desolation and woeful condition, leading to deep sighs and fresh sorrow. Bursting forth like one who can no longer contain himself, he cries out, "Oh, miserable man that I am! What shall I do? How shall I escape this fearful vengeance?" In this state of heaviness, he accuses and laments himself but finds it impossible to avoid the misery he foresees and intolerable to continue under it.

Although he knows there is a remedy and what it is (though many in such heaviness and abasement only grasp it dimly and weakly, making their sorrow more profound), he cannot apply it to himself by any means. In this extreme state and acute distress, he cries out with the same anguish as Paul: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" Therefore, the Lord guides him to an instructor, much like Paul was led to Ananias in Acts 9:17, or sustains him through the public ministry, or by his own knowledge brings him to the point where he can counsel himself based on what he has heard.

### **The third work: they are broken-hearted and humbled.**

The previous consultation, prompted by God's working, leads him to resolve that he will no longer look back to his old Sodom, regardless of the hardships he may endure. Thus, he begins to relent, and his heart is broken. He becomes humble and abased. In this spirit of meekness, he says, much like Paul after his fall, as recounted in Acts 9:6, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Now he realizes that the Lord has him at an advantage, like a man bound in chains, ready and attentive to whatever pleases Him. Whereas before, due to his

stubbornness and stiff-necked nature, he could not be entreated, commanded, or feared.

This sincere humbling of himself before God, acknowledging all his deficiencies, breaches, and wounds in his conscience, marks the beginning of all goodness and grace that a person may feel within themselves. It is the antidote to pride and the strength of a haughty spirit. Regardless of one's knowledge of religion or possession of other good gifts, without humility, a person remains unreformed and untransformed. It is a remarkable discipline and nurturing process that can swiftly break the hardness of such a heart and bend it as easily as a twig or wand, wherever it pleases, whereas previously, it was as unyielding as a great tree to the slightest influence.

Thus, the Lord must work in this unformed and stubborn individual before they can be made right and upright. However, you might ask, what progress has this person made towards God's kingdom, and the understanding and knowledge of their redemption from the misery mentioned earlier? I would reply that they have made significant progress in every way. By becoming humble, they are now easily persuaded. Enlightened by the same Spirit of God that initially cast them down with heaviness and fear, they are now capable of contemplating and remembering God's sweet promises. Although they had heard these promises before, they saw no connection to them and dared not hope in them. Now, they can think about what they previously heard through preaching, with the hope that they may benefit from it. They come to understand that God is of such a nature that He can be entreated and reconciled to them.

**The fourth work: a secret desire for forgiveness.**

Through such considerations, he lifts himself up, and the Lord ignites within him a special desire for the forgiveness of sins and the favor of God. This desire cannot be right and well-ordered unless it arises from some hope that God will be entreated by him.

Here, he sets before his eyes, more clearly than before, the nature of God – how loving and kind He is, how ready to pardon, and how even great sinners (who might be more easily dismayed than he) have found favor with Him. Furthermore, he is helped by the remembrance that none are exempt from this benefit except those who exempt themselves. The bruised reed, especially, shall not be broken, and the contrite heart shall not be despised. The heavy-laden who come to Him shall be eased, and those who mourn shall be comforted, as they are already blessed.

Although, due to ignorance and improper nurturing, many are far from such thoughts and affections for some time (the devil working on their weaknesses), and God also disposes it so that even some who have the best means and help may feel and see their own weakness for a time, He eventually works these things in them if He intends to save them. This fervent desire, this hunger for mercy, this earnest longing for a remedy through Christ, is so intense and fervent in him that, like a man condemned to death who values a pardon above all the pleasures and gains in the world, he cannot find joy in anything else. Thus, this poor sinner, feeling the terror of God's curse and knowing that there is no release for him except in Christ, longs above all things in the world to be made a partaker of Him.

In this hunger and thirst for pardon, how welcome do we think good tidings would be to him now? To a man who is so lowly, so abased in his own eyes, and so far from all hope of worldly remedy in himself

or others, any word of comfort at that time would be immensely acceptable. It would be much more welcome than all the promises of the Gospel have ever been to him before or than anything else in the world is to him now. Then, if he might have the simplest diet, it would be sweet and savory, whereas before even a honeycomb was not pleasant to him. Crumbs under the table would be comforting refreshments to him, whereas previously, he was glutted with the children's delicacies. How glad such a person would be if his heavenly Father received him as a hired servant, when he could not previously accept the role of a son! But the messenger who could bring him tidings of righteousness, a messenger sent by God to tell him that God will be merciful to his offenses and remember his sins no more, would be one in a thousand. To hear that Jesus Christ has vanquished sin, death, and the devil, who once had power over him, and has brought to light immortality and life for him. To know that he has been given perfect righteousness to cover his shame and make him comely and favored in the sight of God. To understand that he is now fully reconciled to God, all former disgrace, mental anguish, and deadly enslavement abandoned – what could be more welcome?

Is it to be thought that a man, being in the previously mentioned condition, filled with misery from head to toe, not knowing where to hide himself, not seeing how to bear the burden of his grief, would make no reckoning of this message? It would be like a man on the brink of death refusing to drink, or a person at the place of execution rejecting their pardon. Among other thoughts, one of the most profitable ones that God enables him to fix upon is this: He lays his condition in a pair of balances. On one side, he sees that there is no hope of mercy and certain condemnation if he continues in the state he has lived in. On the other side, he considers that God calls sinners to repentance, giving His Son to redeem even great offenders. As the King of Nineveh said, there may be hope that God will have mercy

upon him if he sues and seeks in humility and remorse. The Lord continues to guide him this way.

While some others in this case might rush out of their sorrow, either trying to break through it before it has humbled them or being overcome by it, the soul of the poor sinner whom God intends to save is meekened and humbled. It waits until God further sustains and upholds it with continued sighs and desires. The soul longs for the bright beams of God's favor through Christ to shine upon it, desiring above all else to be relieved of this woe and to receive pardon for its sins. However, it may lack the power to pray for what it most fervently desires.

After this manner, his consultation and resolution proceed. This is his mindset, and thus he deliberates and reflects upon himself. Though he may not be able to apply the remedy to himself in this state, the general hope he finds in the promises – that God is kind and merciful to broken-hearted sinners – causes him to anchor himself, knowing that perhaps God will be merciful to him. He resolves sincerely and with full intent to seek forgiveness of his sins from God. He will go this way, come what may, even if it means perishing. Yet he has some hope, and he determines never to return to his former deadly state. Instead, he will confess and reveal his long-continued wickedness to the Lord, even though it may be against himself. He will not spare himself in areas where he has most pleased his own heart, as he sees the vanity of those desires. His resolve to forsake sin is not a means to his justification but is born out of detestation of his former wickedness, driven by God to do so.

This resolution is one step or degree by which he progresses toward the fuller certainty of the happiness he seeks, receiving a great measure of grace and favor. Satan, who knows this, tries to hold men

back from it with many strong cords, preventing them from making a final decision. Even though they may receive counsel to hurry and seek the Lord – which is best for them – profit, pleasure, friendship, or fear may hold them back. They may rashly proclaim their intent to change in moments of heat and haste, driven by sickness, tempests, fear of death, or similar circumstances. However, such resolutions are often fleeting. Unlike them, the one of whom I speak, who has deeply examined his condition, cannot be drawn back to his former licentiousness. He knows that nothing is as terrible to him as his previous state.

If one wonders what good comes from his resolution, it can be said that when this is accomplished in him, his heart is softened, humbled, and made like Paul's, who, after God opposed his journey to Damascus to persecute His saints, fell to the ground and asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" When he reaches this point, his heart is filled with sorrow for displeasing God, though not to the extent it will be later. Now it is a heart of flesh, not of stone, in which the saving grace of God can be planted and received. All of this is achieved through the marvelous and secret operation of God's Holy Spirit, who begins and completes the entire work of receiving Christ, including the middle part – bending and softening the heart – which cannot be done by any other means. God's Spirit not only breaks and bruises the clods of the heart with a hammer but also leads it further.

### **The fifth work: they confess and ask pardon.**

With these holy affections in this poor sinner, there is a growing encouragement and a bolder access to God by the same Spirit. He begins to confess his sins to God, especially those in which he has taken the most pleasure and which have had the strongest hold on



him. He says, just as the prodigal child did, "I will go to my father and confess, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and thee,'" no matter how difficult it may be for him. Alongside confessing his sins, he pours out earnest prayers to God for the pardon of those sins through the mediation of Christ. While these actions may seem insignificant to him (as he is not yet a competent judge in this matter), the Scripture commends them as great. They are considered the fruit of even a small and weak faith, and the one who obtains them is in special favor with God. This is most vividly seen in the parable mentioned earlier, where the father (symbolizing God) met his lost son before the son reached him. The father embraced and kissed him after the son resolved to seek favor and pardon from him and acknowledge his faults. Was there anything, we may ask, in the natural father that is not much more present in the Father of Mercy? God surpasses all earthly fathers in kindness and compassion. Thus, by His Holy Spirit, the Lord works in the hearts of His children. With all these previously mentioned graces, which He bestows upon them, He draws them to esteem and value the benefit of redemption so highly that they are willing to sacrifice everything else for it. Just as the wise merchant values the field where the pearl is hidden and sells all to obtain it, they too regard everything else as secondary in comparison and are determined to forsake anything that might hinder them from obtaining it.

**The sixth work: they forsake all for it, and highly prize it.**

But what then? Some may ask, do you claim that these things can benefit a person without faith? (For nothing has been said about faith so far.) Do you assert that a person can be justified (which means being in favor with God) without having faith, or that God

accepts anything a person does (such as desiring forgiveness, hungering for it, humbling oneself, approaching God in prayer, and confessing sins) when all of these actions are performed without faith? Or, if not, are you suggesting that we must prepare ourselves in this manner to receive faith? But attributing free will to a person who is still in a state of misery, bondage, and unregeneration, without faith, is a flawed notion. To the first question, I say that while none of these actions are faith itself, they are not devoid of it, as I will explain further later on. God is pleased with no one, and no one is justified before Him except through faith. However, we cannot discern or pinpoint the exact moment when faith is produced. When the other graces of God mentioned earlier are effectively produced in the heart, faith is also brought about by the same Spirit. A person who has received this faith into their heart cannot so certainly and easily judge it, as they can with those other gifts that accompany it. In response to the second objection, I want to make it clear that I do not attribute any inherent goodness to an unrenewed person that enables them to prepare themselves to receive faith. They lack all goodness in their will and the power to do good. Such graces are given to them by God, as mentioned before. God finds all people in their filthiness and bloodshed, as the prophet Ezekiel says, and the Church, whom He deigns to make His beloved spouse, is raised from the dust, washed, and cleansed from her filthiness. Then, He takes her as His dear and only spouse. Therefore, it is the Lord who is the author and finisher of the faith of those who will be saved, and He abases them, filling their hearts with sorrows for this very purpose. He also seasons their faith over time with hope and comfort. This is His sole work. While it is difficult to determine when faith is produced, as I mentioned earlier, and how long dreadful fear persists, through knowledge of their misery and redemption, God works both in their hearts at the time and in the manner that seems best according to His wisdom. This demonstrates that God is the one

doing this work. Having addressed these two objections, I will now proceed to explain in more detail how God guides and brings home this lost sheep, as I had begun to do before I was led to digress due to the two previous questions now answered. To continue with the individual whom the Lord intends to save, after instilling in them a strong desire for the remedy to their misery, God does not leave them there, as many are kept in that state due to ignorance and lack of proper guidance. Though they may not be in utter unbelief, they are still hesitant to apply God's promise to their souls. Many individuals, even those who have experienced contrition of heart, never progress further and remain wavering. When their desires are unfulfilled, their hearts become discouraged, and they often abandon their quest altogether. However, God continues to work further with the person I mentioned earlier, as I previously described.

For he, having now, with the skillful merchant, weighed the price of this pearl – namely, to have Christ become his – holds it in such high esteem that he regards all other things as insignificant in comparison. In wise consideration, he sells all that he has to obtain it. But what, you may ask, does he have of his own to purchase or acquire it? His goods and riches, whatever he possesses, are not truly his own but belong to another and are borrowed. Yet many thousand poor souls who will be saved have little or no wealth at all. However, this precious pearl is not acquired with money. So, what does he have to procure it, you may wonder? In truth, he has nothing but an interest and hold in sinful pleasures and worldly lusts. But alas, some may say, why even mention them as though they were of any worth? Nevertheless, I must reiterate that I must mention what he has of his own, and that is his sin. Although every reasonable person may say that it is not worth mentioning, there was a time when it was more precious to him than silver and considered above the purest gold. Therefore, renouncing it is no easy or small matter. And yet, it so

happens for him that nothing else is required to attain the aforementioned pearl than the casting away and forsaking of his sin. The Lord clearly testifies to this: "He who denies himself shall be my disciple; and whoever forsakes anything that God condemns shall receive a hundredfold more than he gives up" – such a generous rewarder is the Lord of all who seek Him, and eventually, eternal life.

Therefore, when this simple sinner understands and believes this, as dear and pleasant as his sins once were to him – sins he could not be persuaded to abandon before, either through fear or shame, allurements, or persuasion – now he disowns them and cries out against them. In utter detestation of his sins, he says, as Ephraim said of idols, in which she once delighted, "What have I to do with them?" This is truly admirable. A man giving up what he loved most of all, even more than life itself (for how many lose their lives for sinful pleasures?), willingly and readily, solely for the hope of that which he does not yet possess – is this not admirable? Must not that hope, we think, be sure and certain, though in him still so weak that he cannot yet profess it? The Lord thus works in the heart of the one who will embrace Christ as his Savior, so that nothing will separate them. It is fittingly said, "No one comes to Him unless the Father draws him by His Spirit." For otherwise, we read that it is as hard for a wicked person to become good as it is for a black Moor to change his skin or a leopard his spots.

And whereas it may be said that there are many, when they are pricked in conscience for their sins, who do cry out against them for a time, but it later appears to have been merely a fleeting moment, and as it seems, a sudden passion that vanishes and amounts to nothing – I acknowledge this to be true. I concede that such instances occur. However, this is a vastly different matter, and this work of grace, forsaking all for the hope of mercy and forgiveness of

sin, differs as much from that hasty and momentary outburst of fear-driven cries against sin as a cannon shot differs from a paper bullet – the former expelling the devil to no longer dominate, while the latter appears to drive him away with bold and loud words (defying the devil, etc.) but actually accomplishes nothing, no more than the Popish holy water. This can be seen when comparing both types of reactions. For example, even though Ahab displayed signs of renouncing his sins by tearing his clothes (though not his heart), putting on sackcloth, and fasting, he soon revealed that it was all mere ceremony when he willfully resisted and disobeyed God's message through the prophet and boldly claimed to hate the prophet. In contrast, Zacchaeus behaved differently. He demonstrated how he received Christ's doctrine through the resulting fruits – making amends for his ill-gotten wealth by restoring fourfold and giving half of the remainder to the poor. Christ Himself testified to Zacchaeus' forsaking his lucrative and unlawful trade by openly affirming him to be a son of Abraham. Another example is the people whom Samuel persuaded to forsake their sins for the hope of the promise. They did not just lament after God; they indeed abandoned their sins, casting away their beloved idols, Baalim and Ashtaroth, to signify that they had found through the prophet's ministry a much greater treasure – the mercy of God in forgiving their sins. This aligns with the truth written since the first man's repentance: "He who confesses and forsakes his sin shall find mercy." On the other hand, their forefathers, who also made a great show of returning to God and seeking Him early, merely flattered Him with their mouths and dissembled with their tongues, for they were not faithful to His covenant. But these examples should suffice; there are many more like them. Therefore, let it be acknowledged that this is a mighty and remarkable work of God's Spirit, which persuades this simple soul striving to find peace and rest for his heart to bid farewell to his sweetest delights for the hope set before him. For these two elements

go hand in hand: highly valuing and treasuring the promise of life and happiness while simultaneously despising and regarding lightly the dearest things. Yet, as impossible as it is for anyone else, God works it sensibly in those He chooses out of the world, so that we may discern the wild beast being tamed and the clear, sunny day being overshadowed and darkened. God kindles a fervent desire and longing for the good news – namely, that He will freely bestow it upon the one who thirsts for it – until it is held and enjoyed as one's own. What Saint Paul said of himself holds true for all such individuals: upon recognizing the beauty of this blessed message, they consider everything else as loss, even things that had been advantageous to them, or even as dung for the sake of Christ, that they may gain Him. Once this work is accomplished, where they forsake all things for what they seek and hold it in such high regard, they are then ready to apply it, as follows, which is the final work.

**The seventh work is as follows: they apply Christ and His promise.**

Through the doctrine of the promises, which he hears or has heard preached to him, he inclines his heart to apply them to himself, fastening upon them as if they were made specifically for him. He persuades himself, through what he hears, to no longer fear God as a dreadful Judge and to cease living in his previous bondage, always feeling in danger of damnation and under the curse. Instead, he seals his salvation in his heart, making it as assuredly his as any contract is secured when the seller has sealed it or given earnest money. This is why the Scriptures frequently use the phrase "We are sealed by the spirit of promise and by the spirit of our God." It illustrates that nothing is more securely assured to us than a sealed document.

Thus, there can be no surer way for a person to possess this redemption and salvation than by having it sealed by the spirit of God, who alone knows the mind of the Father and the Son, making it known to his mind and bearing witness to his spirit that he belongs to the Lord. The spirit teaches him to reason in this manner: "If God will forgive those who have received grace to seek without fainting or weariness, who long for it with a contrite heart for offending Him, who desire it more than all earthly pleasure and profit, and are willing to cast away all hindrances that may impede it, and if He has molded me to be such a person, then doubtlessly He will be merciful and forgive me."

Thus, God helps the individual I speak of to clearly see that he belongs to God, never to be separated from Him after he has opened his heart, just as He did with Lydia. He causes him to believe that the Son of God, given to the unworthy world, is also given to him, being one of the same. For if earthly fathers are kind to their children when they cry out to them, how much more the Father of fathers? We should believe that the afflicted person I mentioned earlier often and deeply contemplates the truth, immutability, and everlasting nature of the precious promises he hears preached to him. He considers this with more delight than anything else. He contemplates what might hinder or deter him from having his share in them, and when he recognizes that God, who commands him not to fear, is greater than all that might oppose him, he removes whatever obstacles may stand in his way, no matter how dear they may be to him. He considers what gives him the greatest encouragement and embraces it. We must believe that once he comprehends the incomparable excellence of eternal life and how it continually cheers the soul, even in this world, he regards it as the most potent medicine to heal his wounds. Therefore, he is ready to employ any means and expend any effort to

attain it and make it his own, especially when he sees that it is offered so freely and mercifully.

Setting his heart upon it, as something that he perceives would make him happier than all the world, even though, for a time, he may not have been able to attain the assurance of it, with the devil holding him back through various hindrances and subtleties, exploiting his errors, weaknesses, and simplicity. However, the Lord does not allow him to give up until he has overcome all obstacles. And if he finds this too difficult to achieve on his own, he seeks the assistance of others, wherever he can find them, individuals with greater insight, judgment, and experience concerning God's will and purpose for salvation. Through their loving labor and counsel, he becomes more knowledgeable and resolute, settling his heart in believing as he sees good reasons and strong encouragement for his complete peace and contentment.

The Lord Himself speaks thus: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, and I will give him the water of life to drink." So, even though the recipient of this message might initially find it far beyond his expectations, when he weighs and thoughtfully considers the truth of the matter and the certainty of the promises, recognizing the depth of love within God, how it quickens and refreshes the soul of the brokenhearted, even though they are unworthy, he embraces them. Gradually, as he gathers more strength through their infallibility, he believes them and takes immense comfort in them. He gives thanks to God and, as he has good cause, finds himself unsatisfied and unable to have enough of them.

Thus, his soul sustains itself, knowing that since God freely gives it to him, and since he desires it above all else, recognizing that he cannot be safe without it, who can hinder it? All tears are wiped away, the



rags are discarded, and the robes are put on. The bride is betrothed to Christ her husband, and through faith, she becomes a partaker of all the good things He brings with Him. Christ is given to His Church not as something meager or bare but as her wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. The one who has clothed himself with the Lord Jesus will be recognized by God as His own, wherever He finds him, and no one can take him out of His hands, as our Savior Himself affirms: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand, for My Father who gave them to Me is greater than all, and no one is able to take them out of My Father's hand." All those who glorify God in this life are like these, separated from the world though harassed by its people, just as sheep are annoyed by goats. The nature of their conduct shall be explained elsewhere and laid out in more detail in the future. This is faith, which, while making them inwardly convinced to some extent by such clear evidence, as I have described, ultimately causes them to profess it more boldly and without fear when the occasion arises. Though it may be weak and feeble for a time, it is sound and secure. After experiencing a godly life (I mean a life led by faith), it is strengthened, better confirmed, and, with it, their souls find rest.

Where these aforementioned graces are present, such as genuine contrition, a heart broken with sorrow and humbled, a longing and pining for mercy and grace, confessing and forsaking sin, along with pleading and deep groaning for pardon, there is certainly some measure of saving faith. For God's graces do not exist in isolation. Our Savior pronounces those blessed who possess these graces, and none are blessed without faith. Therefore, faith is also present because the Spirit of Christ dwells in such individuals, and He dwells in His people through faith. That is why it must necessarily be in

them. I emphasize this point because it is more discerned and confirmed through these other holy affections that accompany it than by itself, and because many young believers cannot be entirely certain or fully convinced that they possess faith and, consequently, that their sins are forgiven. Yet through infallible signs and tokens, we know that it is so. I refer to the lowest degree of it. Stronger faith presents an easier question. The weakest measure of faith is when a humbled soul longs and almost faints for God's mercy in Christ, even though they are not assured of it. However, they see that it cannot be denied because they recognize that they have received many graces and works of the Holy Spirit, which cannot exist in a reprobate. This prevents them from despair and dread. Still, due to weakness and a lack of experience, they cannot call God "Father," though they cannot entertain the contrary thought within themselves. Therefore, their most significant effort is to be satisfied and resolved that they may have clearer light and a firmer grasp on the fact that Christ has indeed redeemed them. They are like a child learning to walk, whose joints are weak at first but eventually grows strong enough to run. Likewise, the soul that longs and mourns for God in this manner will progress and grow stronger.

I have spoken these words for the sake of those who find it more difficult to grasp God's mercy and struggle to apply His promises to themselves. It is of utmost importance to diligently pursue this and not be deterred from thorough self-examination by any obstacles. The grace to do so is crucial, and he is truly wise who does not rest until he attains it. God will teach this wisdom to those whom He loves. While many ignorant and careless listeners hardly or never reach a resolution of faith, typically, when people are soundly, clearly, and wisely instructed, it is different. Regarding those who shall be saved, the Word, when preached in this way, gradually penetrates the hearts of many. Although they may not know precisely

when this gracious work of God occurred, just as we cannot observe plants and herbs sprouting, we see the results over time. Yet some individuals are uniquely privileged by God at a specific moment to receive the grace and gift of assurance, which others labor and toil for a long time before obtaining. Just as our Savior Christ declared of Zacchaeus, "This day is this man become the son of Abraham, and salvation is come into his house." The same was true for Lydia and those in Acts 2:37.

This faith, whether weak or strong, unites believers with Christ, making those who possess it, a mystery and riddle to the world, realize and enjoy their heart's desire—more than they could wish or think, to truly become the children of God and thereby find happiness. It is the same faith for which Christ pronounced Peter blessed. Though Peter had it, and it belongs to those of whom I speak, anyone whom the Lord blesses possesses this precious faith, whether weak or strong (2 Peter 1:1). However, the common Gospel professors and listeners do not have it because they do not anticipate that the Lord will reveal it to them. Without this revelation, they cannot attain it but rely on their wisdom and reason, which hinder and restrain them. Reason deems it absurd and laughable that a simple sinner, especially one burdened with misery and openly confessing it, should be happier before God and in their own understanding than all the world's riches can make them. Mans wisdom cannot be persuaded of this, but faith regards it as truth and enjoys such a state with confidence.

As for how God reveals such a thing to people (although it is plainly stated that He did so for Peter), they cannot tell or see it unless they think and hope it might happen in them, even without their awareness of it, given the evident change it produces. Or they may believe that God might unveil this secret mystery of faith to them,

without their awareness, with special signs accompanying it. However, such individuals should understand that while faith is a gift from God, He works through outward means. This happens as people obey His ordinance by attending the preaching of His Word, eagerly seeking and praying for this work daily. His ministers speak, and the people listen reverently, believing they may receive this work, whether during the sermon or later as they examine their state and compare it with the taught doctrine. This is as I've described earlier in the case of the person whom the Lord will save.

Unfortunately, many fail to engage in such efforts to hear, evaluate their state by the taught standards, and diligently strive for it, removing hindrances until they see that they have found what they sought and that there is no just cause to prevent it. Few are willing to put in the labor or exert mental effort on such matters, deeming it unappetizing and unwelcome. As a result, after so much preaching on faith, there is, as our Savior predicted, little faith in the world. Few people truly understand it, even though they dislike being thought of in this way, as may be evident from what I have explained and what will follow.

Before I proceed further, for the reader's better recollection, I will conclude what I have undertaken in this third section of the first part of this book. To reiterate, there are many departures from the right path leading to eternal life, and many deviations from it, and it is conceived by only a few. However, the one whom the Lord chooses and regards as His own will both discern this path from all the detours and walk in it, thereby becoming a partaker of happiness through belief. This also reveals who belongs to the Lord and who, with reverent boldness (though it may be hardly obtained at first), can assure themselves against all the subtleties of the devil and other cursed spirits that they will see the Lord in the land of the living. It is

the one who has truly been humbled in the sight of their misery, seen Christ Jesus as the sole deliverer for such, and thus believes in Him sincerely.

In this manner, I have explained how both the doctrines of misery and redemption should work, which constitutes the third point. However, since we are often fearful at the outset of our effectual calling and hesitate to believe that we possess any faith, I have briefly listed a few marks that accompany even the weakest faith. When these signs are found, they serve as infallible indicators that in such a person, there exists some true measure of justifying faith. These marks are as follows:

First, if we strive against doubting (Judges 6:17).

Second, if, despite not feeling faith, we bitterly lament the lack of it.

Third, if we fervently seek to be firmly established in belief.

Fourth, if we desire to identify and remove any sin that might potentially hinder us.

One of these graces, or similar ones, will always be observed in a believer by those who can judge, even if not always perceived by the individual themselves.

## **CHAP. 5:**

## Of the Obstacles to Faith, Especially in Regard to the Minister

Now that I have demonstrated how faith transforms individuals from enemies of God into His people (and consequently justifies them), and how His beloved were once not beloved, I would be inclined to conclude my discussion on this matter. However, I recognize that not every truth is readily accepted. This is especially true in the case of faith, as it is frequently lamented and bemoaned in Scripture that few possess this faith, and it is seldom found in the world. Those of us who observe the actions and behavior of the majority can understand why this may be the case. Therefore, I will speak more extensively here for the benefit of my dear and weaker brethren to provide satisfaction and identify the main obstacles that hinder faith, particularly in relation to the Minister.

Considering that faith honors, enriches, and beautifies individuals, as previously discussed, it should have a significantly different effect on the thousands who believe they possess it (but are mistaken). Instead, it should cause awe and fear in Epicures, Atheists, Papists, and other hypocrites who, at present, bear little distinction from them. Those who truly possess faith should expose the religion of those with any semblance of faith (which, in reality, is a collection of falsehoods and heresies) for what it truly is. They should also highlight the emptiness of others who disregard faith altogether, causing them to be reviled as they deserve. Yet, at present, those who have experienced only a modicum of the true fruit of the Gospel are regarded with disdain, even by many who profess to believe, as well as by the rest who are enemies of the truth. This is akin to the complaint made by the Prophet Isaiah in his time when he said, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me, are as signs and as wonders in Israel" (Isaiah 8:18).

In summary, let us examine why so many boldly claim to believe and trust in Christ's death for salvation yet are entirely devoid of true faith. This issue is succinctly explained by Saint Paul, who states that if "our Gospel be hidden" (as it is hidden to none but those who are lost), "the god of this world hath blinded their minds, that the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should not shine unto them." He makes it clear that the fault lies with individuals who willingly choose to be blinded and held back, even though Satan is the one deceiving them and preventing them from attaining the great treasure offered by the Gospel. We acknowledge that the fault lies with humanity, as they listen to and believe Satan's deceitful suggestions. However, God foresaw this and appointed watchmen who would warn His people, revealing how Satan obstructs their faith with his cunning tricks so that they may prevent it. Therefore, we must understand that the hindrance to faith, whether it lies in the one who delivers the message (the watchman, who is the Minister) or in those who receive it (the people and listeners), must be removed in both cases. Without the removal of these obstacles, faith is rarely, if ever, acquired.

It is clear, therefore, to begin with the Minister, that if he does not teach at all, those who rely on him cannot know the love that God bears to them through Christ. Or at least, they cannot know that this love belongs to them, as faith comes by hearing the word of God preached to them. As our Savior said, "If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch." Therefore, it is evident that in some parishes, not one person knows that they are saved, especially if they rely on their Minister. All such knowledge remains a mystery to them.

However, if this were the only obstacle on the Minister's part, it would be manageable for many people. But in places where teaching is rare, the listeners are bound to be ignorant of this matter as well.

This heavenly truth, teaching people how to know that they are the elect of God and to do so without wavering, cannot be sufficiently and clearly presented by occasional and less skillful teachers. Furthermore, even if it could, the listeners might not be able to grasp, understand, remember, or become familiar with it enough to examine themselves and prove that their condition is good, which is essential.

While I acknowledge that the fundamental truths in this matter are few, breaking them down into smaller pieces for the people's benefit requires effort, time, clarity, and love. Teaching the same thing repeatedly is necessary for their safety. It requires a nurturing or motherly affection to communicate with them effectively, giving them little by little, line by line, so they may savor the message and be saved by it. Although some Ministers might assume that a little is sufficient, and that the people are unresponsive and unwilling to understand, the well-advised should follow Saint Paul's rule to Timothy. They should be ready to teach diligently, in season and out of season, reminding the people daily of their duty. This charge from Christ emphasizes the importance of thorough teaching, especially since the people rely on the Minister.

Ministers should also consider the many weaknesses of the people, such as dullness, slippery memories, and various hindrances that necessitate frequent teaching. It astonishes me when I think about the great slackness and unwillingness of many gifted individuals who hear and know that those with an office must attend to it. Neglecting this duty is condemned, and loving Christ should motivate them to feed His lambs and sheep, especially since the flock relies on them. Nonetheless, some contentedly reap the benefits while refusing the labor, deeming it beneath them. Regardless of how easily they justify



themselves before others, they will not be able to answer to God without peace.

Even if this obstacle on the Minister's part is remedied, there may be many other obstacles hindering the hearers from acquiring faith, even if they are willing to be taught. If the Minister teaches frequently but does not take care to understand the people's weaknesses and limitations in comprehending the doctrine to be delivered to them, speaking above their level of understanding will hinder their edification. Nothing is more detrimental to the people than such teaching when they have a learned preacher who, despite their initial optimism, cannot provide them with light, faith, godliness, and true comfort because the message is not easy and clear to them.

Although it is hoped that some things would not be presented to the people unless the speaker has first examined them through Scripture, many speak without a clear understanding of the matters they discuss. I mention this not to criticize my brethren who seek to do good in the Church of God, having received gifts for that purpose. Instead, I urge everyone to make an effort to be understood when speaking the truth. Neglecting plain speech is a primary reason for little fruit from one's labors. However, this does not mean promoting rudeness, absurdity, or barbarism in teaching, which would only make teachers seem ridiculous and undermine the credibility of the Scriptures. Rather, simplicity and clarity should earn respect for the Minister's Ministry among the listeners, allowing their consciences to approve the doctrine that aligns with the Lord's Word and is easily comprehensible. This way, they can recognize that the message is delivered with power and authority, not merely as the teachings of the Scribes.

There is one more thing, in my judgment, that hinders progress on the teacher's part, and that is when the chief foundations of faith are not taught briefly and clearly through catechism, in the right and logical order. These foundations should build upon and follow one another coherently, allowing the people to clearly see the path to salvation. This approach would help them derive more benefit from the entire preaching and ministry. For instance, repentance should not be required of the people before faith. Faith should not be confirmed in the people when they see no need for it due to their sin and misery. It's clear that those who don't find their sins bitter and sour will not savor the sweetness of Christ. Furthermore, people should be taught that as soon as they believe, they become new creatures and undergo a change in heart and life. The newly born should desire growth through the sincere milk of the Word. It would greatly aid their ministry if, alongside the sound and clear teaching of religious fundamentals, ministers would engage in discussions, questions, catechizing, and examinations during communions to assess how well the doctrine is received. The lack of such assessments leads to a misguided positive opinion of many hearers who, despite frequent exposure, lack understanding of crucial matters. It would be beneficial if ministers willing to take on this labor (though it may be tedious and unwelcome to some) were granted the authority to test how well their audience is profiting. This would help strengthen the weaker members and identify areas where improvement is most needed. Moreover, it would enable the purging of Popery, other errors, and potential infiltration by Jesuits, Priests, Papists, or heretics in parishes and towns. Without proper assessment, the people remain entrenched in their ignorance, superstition, and old beliefs. A minister who is both capable and diligent, working collaboratively with the people to develop a sufficient catechism for a few essential topics, could be confident that he is calling as many as God has appointed there to the fellowship of

precious faith, leading to eternal life. Without this, it is all too true that much preaching has less impact, as those who delve deeper into the issue can see. I sincerely wish that those who neglect this valuable work and essential duty would be compelled to undertake it with utmost diligence. Such an undertaking, carried out with Christian care, exemplary conduct, and a commitment to being a guiding light in their communities while avoiding reproachful faults, would yield immense benefits. Not only would it help restore the due credit and reverence to the ministry, lost due to the practices of the Popish hierarchy and the ignorance, rudeness, blindness, and shameless lives of many under the Gospel, but it would also bring many back to God who would otherwise be lost. If, in addition, there were a willingness to engage in private discussions with those seeking support during times of special need and occasion, to provide comfort in times of distress, and to encourage religious and godly conversations in private gatherings and at tables by setting an example—rather than engaging in profane, worldly, and needless talk—then people could speak good things in private as effectively as teaching the truth in public, following the example set by Christ. I have no doubt that God would richly bless their harvest.

## **CHAP. 6.**

Of the obstacles that hinder faith on behalf of the People.

But if the Minister is both in life and doctrine as we would wish, giving warnings to the people about Satan's malicious intentions and other impediments, and striving to lead them to faith, they will still

encounter numerous obstacles. Unless they, for their part, are willing to seek counsel and accept the message and doctrine, they will find that due to one hindrance or another, only a few of them will partake in the precious faith I speak of. To be more explicit, my meaning is that Satan places countless stumbling blocks in their path. When God, through the preaching of the Gospel, reveals how their sins are forgiven and their deadly woe is removed in Christ, many do not pay attention or make any effort to understand it. They consider it a trivial matter, as though God were seeking His own benefit by making such an offer to them, rather than theirs. They believe they owe God no gratitude for teaching them the way to salvation, and they fail to see its importance. Others believe they have weightier matters to attend to, such as their pleasures and profits, which the devil dazzles their eyes with, blinding them to the message that could save them. So, Satan deceives them, and they do not feel an affection for the preaching of the Gospel, even though it is the only source of salvation. By one deception or another, he leads them to the point where even those who receive the doctrine willingly and without resistance believe they have faith, though they do not manifest its power.

At present, it is clear that among the thousands who willingly or at least without resistance receive the good news of eternal life through our preaching, very few, if any, attain true faith or display any evidence of it in their lives. Many of them do not feel any inner need that compels them to seek help outside themselves, in Christ. And if they do feel a need, they quickly transfer their burden to Him without experiencing any hardship. They only turn to Him when their need becomes urgent, and they claim to believe in Him, but their faith does not provide them with any more stability or confidence, nor does it lead to a reformation in their lives. They serve Him with their words and lips while following their own desires in

their hearts. Others waver between hope and doubt, rejoicing at one moment without being able to explain why, and then sinking into despair the next, indicating a lack of stability and peace. Regarding all these individuals, the words of the Apostle are profoundly true: "The Gospel being hidden from them," which means they do not believe its promises. The devil, by one means or another, has blinded them so that they do not believe. As for the latter group, even though they recognize the severity of their misery and its inevitability through any means they can conceive, how could they be content to remain without a remedy if they were not enchanted and deprived of their right mind by the devil? The remedy is freely and graciously offered to them.

The same thing is further proven by the practice of true Christians who, having a sure hold and taste of Christ's merits through faith, will not entertain delusions that deceive others and might rob them of their assurance. Although they face strong and fierce temptations, they focus on the greatness of God's love, the truth and certainty of His promises, and the benefits they receive through faith. Even in the midst of intense battles and deep sorrows, they do not give up or surrender their faith into Satan's hands. Like someone on the verge of drowning who clings to a sharp sword, they choose to keep their faith despite great difficulties rather than surrender their souls, which are sustained only by faith, to the devil and face perdition. Thus, we hear them uttering such words, testifying to severe conflicts with Satan: "Though you kill me, O Lord, yet will I trust in you," and "Though I walk in the midst of the valley of death, yet will I not forsake you." These declarations show that the god of this world not only casts veils over the eyes of the best but also attempts to extinguish all light of faith in them, as He does with others entirely. However, God has equipped them with the skills to fight and resist, while the others lack this skill and are defeated.

Therefore, it is crucial for all to understand that no one is deprived of the benefits of the Gospel and the ability to believe it unto salvation unless they willingly submit to Satan's yoke and accept the loss of the crown of righteousness and eternal life through their own folly. More discerning individuals refuse to let it slip away. To help different groups recognize their respective obstacles, I have thought it good to list them briefly and specifically, or at least as many as commonly hinder people from embracing and believing in the promise of eternal life. Those who wish may then see how they are held back from attaining happiness and peace. These hindrances are as follows:

1. First, some think it impossible to be assured of their salvation in this life, and therefore, they do not seek after it.
2. Others think it possible but not necessary for men to concern themselves with obtaining and preserving it, believing they can be saved without much effort.
3. Another group believes it to be both possible and necessary, but they view it as so difficult to attain that they are reluctant to make the effort.
4. Some are careless and as ignorant as their negligence suggests. They are always learning but never come to the knowledge of the truth. Despite attending gatherings, they pay little heed when God speaks to them through His Word. Their minds are preoccupied with other matters, preventing them from understanding the doctrine, let alone embracing it.
5. Others realize that pursuing heavenly things would require them to forsake their liberties in sinful pleasures, which they are unwilling to give up. They also recognize that they would have to endure reproach and afflictions alongside the children of God,

which deters them from seeking the promise of eternal life, akin to Esau.

6. Some are presumptuous, convincing themselves, out of self-love, that they have faith while retaining some sin or many sins in their hearts that they refuse to renounce. They content themselves with the belief that they possess faith when they do not, consequently never seeking its truth and power. They resemble those who claim they would follow Christ but first need to bury their father.
7. Others, while not as gross offenders as the previous group, have never experienced a broken heart upon recognizing their sin and misery. Consequently, the doctrine of faith cannot penetrate their hearts.
8. Some believe that even if they commence, they will not persevere or maintain a godly course. Alternatively, they may take offense in some other way, leading them to never attempt it, or if they have started, to quickly backslide.
9. There are those who acknowledge that it is comforting to know themselves as children of God, and they hope they are indeed His children. They speak well of the Gospel and are glad to hear it, appreciating the promise of eternal life. However, they never make an effort to personally apply it to themselves through meditation, considering its truth and unchangeability, and making a commitment to live by it and conform to it.
10. Others share similar sentiments with the previous group, occasionally contemplating the doctrine, leading them to believe they are in good standing. However, this comfort is fleeting and quickly dissipates. These individuals are tossed to and fro, yet

they keep their hearts guarded, unwilling to disclose their doubts to those who could assist them in overcoming their obstacles, even though they are utterly unable to help themselves.

These are the primary obstacles preventing people from embracing the grace of belief, without which it is impossible to please God or become His children.

And now that I have presented a glimpse of both types of hindrances, I believe it is appropriate to pause for a moment to address both groups responsible for these obstacles, namely the Ministers and the people. First, I turn to you, my brethren in the Ministry, and I encourage you to reflect on your duties as outlined extensively in the word of God. These duties are described using various names and titles, such as watchmen (Ezekiel 33:7, Song of Solomon 3:3), laborers (Matthew 9:37), the salt of the earth, and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14), shepherds (John 21:15), good Scribes who bring out old and new things from their treasury (Matthew 13), stewards responsible for distributing everyone's portion (1 Corinthians 4:1), and nurses (1 Thessalonians 2:7), among others. Additionally, these duties are explicitly commanded, including warnings like "Take heed to your charge and to the whole flock" (Acts 20:28), and "Preach the word, be diligent in season and out of season, convince, reprove, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

What do these teachings and commandments convey if not that those entrusted by the Lord with His people, purchased at such a great price, should tenderly love them as nurses do young children? They should bear with their weaknesses kindly rather than breaking their hearts with sorrow. Furthermore, they should generously



provide for them and teach them the entire counsel of God, acting as good Scribes, and they should treat all individuals as the Lord's stewards by wisely adapting themselves to each person's needs. They must be diligent and diligent workers and laborers, serving as lights to guide, setting an example of uncorrupted living characterized by wisdom and gravity. Above all, they should exhibit humility, as Christ instructed His Disciples when departing from them, not considering themselves too important to serve others (John 13:14-15). With the aim of bringing people to Christ and preserving them as chaste spouses for their only husband, ministers must do good privately as needed. This includes confirming the weak, comforting the afflicted, admonishing the unruly, and practicing patience towards all (Ezekiel 34:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 5:14).

These duties, as I mentioned, are prescribed by the Lord through the titles He bestows upon His Ministers and the associated commandments and charges. Just as we hope the Lord will hear us in our times of need, particularly during our final and solemn departure from this life, we must listen to His call to have compassion on His feeble, ignorant, and wavering people. While the burden may be heavy, our motivations are also extraordinarily great. The honor of being appointed as ambassadors by the Lord to deliver the message of such a great King is unparalleled. Furthermore, the message itself concerns eternal matters rather than transient earthly concerns. What could be compared to it? Moreover, the personal comfort we derive from our private study and communion with God is beyond measure. While others toil and struggle in all weather with great care and trouble, we have the privilege of conversing with God and His faithful servants. Our preaching can also provide greater comfort to us than to those who listen to us. What can compare to the satisfaction of seasoning our own hearts and governing our lives more effectively? As Solomon said, "For wisdom will come into your

heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul" (Proverbs 2:10), unless we neglect our own well-being.

Furthermore, we are motivated to perform our duties with cheerfulness by considering that every soul we turn from their wicked ways is counted as one we have saved (Isaiah 5:20). We should undertake this endeavor now while we have the opportunity and can do it peacefully, as there are many willing to listen, and their example may influence others. If we neglect this task now, we may find it impossible to accomplish later, as the Apostle warns, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Timothy 4:3). Lastly, we should remember that the reward in the afterlife is a more potent incentive than all the aforementioned motivations combined. As Daniel stated, "And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

This is what I deemed necessary to convey to my brethren in the Ministry, who, depending on their various circumstances, locations, congregations, and other factors, will undoubtedly encounter numerous discouragements. However, if they are wise, especially against the greatest adversary of all—their own inner turmoil, contradictions, and disputes—I have no doubt that they can overcome all other challenges. The objections that might trouble and obstruct them in their work and duty are countless. Therefore, keep your focus on God, let Him always lead the way, and make His word your guide (in which alone, you will find sound and lasting peace). He will teach the receptive beyond their expectations, granting wisdom to the simple and strength to the weak. Through Him, you

will discover that what may seem difficult becomes easy, and that in the diligent performance of duty, you can find the greatest joy.

Now, I address you, my brethren, both as congregants and listeners, who, as I mentioned before, often create hindrances for yourselves, even when your Ministers offer none. I pity and lament your situation, for most of you fail to recognize and properly appreciate this great mercy from God. He has sent His preachers among you, and very few among the many truly understand the purpose of their ministry. Consequently, you do not receive them as instruments through whom you may believe, be reformed, and attain happiness. Understand that God has appointed them as messengers of your reconciliation with Him, especially for those who were previously estranged from Him. He could have chosen other means to guide you through this long and wearisome journey, but He has seen fit to use His Ministers as the best way to lead you.

Realize that through their preaching, you can come to know the Lord and find reconciliation with Him. Without their ministry, you would never have the opportunity to hear from the Lord Himself. Remember how the people of Israel, when they heard His voice, were unable to endure it and begged Moses to speak to them instead. Therefore, heed those who are capable of delivering the Lord's message to you. Their preaching has the power to bring life or death. If you despise them and their message, it is as if you despise the Lord Himself who sent them.

Listen to them as though you are listening to the Lord Himself. Learn from their ministry that you are the sons and daughters of Almighty God, even though before encountering the powerful ministry of the Word, you were His enemies, with your hearts set on wickedness, and justly under His wrath. Allow yourselves to be spiritually healed,

even if it means facing discomfort and having your hearts laid bare. Embrace the wholesome words of exhortation and willingly submit to God's Word. This way, you can glorify God for His love toward you, brought to you through the labor and dedication of His ministers among you. By doing so, you may gain more than all the abundance and desires of your hearts combined.

Because you may not fully grasp its greatness, I will attempt to illustrate it in some way. It is so significant that if you attain it, you owe nothing less than your own souls to those who bring it to you (Philemon 19). By fulfilling the duty of teaching among you as previously described, they not only save themselves but also save you. They serve as the means to help you recognize your happiness both here and forever. It is truly astonishing to consider the blindness, and even willful blindness, of the people—their carelessness, and even their audacious carelessness and apathy. Despite our repeated and loud proclamations among them, they seem oblivious to what I am saying, which is meant to capture their attention. I thank God for the few individuals I see who receive the Gospel reverently and gratefully and strive to reform their lives accordingly. However, it is truly lamentable that, during a prolonged period of peace and unhindered access to the Gospel under the prosperous reign of Her Majesty, so few make it the centerpiece of their lives and their greatest possession.

This clearly demonstrates that, in addition to the Priests, Jesuits, and open Recusants who are enemies of the Gospel, there may be many more who claim to love it yet prefer darkness to light because their deeds are evil. They fail to recognize God's messengers as sent by Him for their special benefit. If they truly did, they would not deny these messengers their rightful due, withhold earthly goods from those who provide spiritual riches, or demean those who genuinely

desire to lead them to God. Many people put obstacles in their own path, criticizing the messengers in various ways to ensure they cannot benefit from their counsel and persuasion. If these individuals cannot find legitimate accusations, they are content with any pretense to reject guidance and counsel. They say the messengers are old and senile or lack judgment and experience if they are young. If they are wealthy, they are accused of covetousness; if they are poor, they are considered lowly and contemptible. Married messengers are seen as neglecting their callings for worldly matters, while unmarried ones are viewed with suspicion. In summary, it is disheartening to see how little the people, in one way or another, have embraced the sweet fruit of the Ministry. If you fear God, care for your own well-being and peace, and wish to avoid judgment, then receive the Ministry with reverence as God's message, and most of the obstacles to faith will be removed.

Having outlined the primary obstacles to faith on the part of both Ministers and the people and having provided some exhortation to both groups, I conclude that there are indeed many hindrances to faith. However, it is also evident that remedies can be found (as I mentioned earlier). Regardless of how craftily the devil bewitches and hinders people with these obstacles, the Scripture offers even greater grace, allowing them to overcome all hindrances and discouragements if both Ministers and people conscientiously fulfill their duties.

## **CHAP 7:**

## What Desire Breeds Faith

But since it would take too long to provide remedies for all these hindrances, and the way to attain faith has already been outlined, I will briefly encourage and advise those who are on the right path, having made some progress. This will help them understand what to be cautious of, what to embrace, and how to seek faith using the means and methods I previously described. I will also offer some guidance to strengthen them once they have achieved a true measure of faith. It's worth noting (as I emphasized the importance of a strong desire earlier) that a mere desire for salvation, occasionally stirred in people, does not constitute belief, as some may mistakenly believe, even when it lacks a solid foundation. However, since those who occasionally have a desire for it are mostly the ones whom God makes believers (for there is little hope for those without such a desire), I will clarify what kind of desire it should be and what it should lead to if it is genuine and sincere, so as not to deceive anyone. We may encounter many individuals who have earnestly desired it at times but never obtained it, much like Balaam. It is often difficult to distinguish between their desire and that of those who have genuinely obtained faith. However, over time, it becomes evident that their desire was only temporary or short-lived, fading before it could achieve its goal. Such desires are comparable to those who, in the Gospel, are said to have rejoiced at hearing about it but later saw their joy vanish. In contrast, the desire of true believers cannot be satisfied without faith; it continues to mourn, long, and pine for it, even in the face of obstacles that weaken their hope until those obstacles are removed. Therefore, those who experience fleeting and inconsistent desires must transform them into fervent and unwavering ones. This can be understood through the parable of the pearl: as soon as the skilled merchant discovered its value, he relentlessly pursued it until it became his own. Those with such a

desire should know that they are being powerfully drawn by God, who has revealed their great need for faith and the benefits they will gain from it, thereby making them fit to receive it. Without God's guidance, faith holds no significance to them.

Furthermore, this desire, if the work of God's spirit, is strengthened when the individual values it according to its true worth, to the best of their ability. They esteem it as a most precious treasure to believe in, understanding that the one who believes is dear to God and shall be saved. They recognize that faith surpasses and excels all the world's treasures and everything of value within it.

And so faith and assurance of eternal life must be truly valued by those who will find the blessing in it. This is why Saint Peter calls it "precious faith." Who can esteem it as better than all profit, pleasure, and preferment? Only someone who thinks that all their efforts in seeking it, such as prayer, hearing the word that works faith, questioning about it, and meditating on the promises, are well worth the trouble. They consider these efforts infinitely recompensed, even if they have to wait a long time for the Lord's timing to enjoy it. All of these means may seem needless to another person, who regards it as mere folly to go to such lengths to attain it. Nonetheless, they admit that it is better than the world. However, they can content themselves with hearing the promise and hoping to be saved by Jesus Christ without setting their desires on it. This casual estimation of faith clearly indicates how far they are from possessing it.

The difference between these two individuals lies in the fact that one is led by the Spirit of God, which reveals the secret mystery of faith to them and draws their heart towards it. The other, guided by worldly reason, is the greatest adversary of this work. Human reason deems

it unnecessary to value something invisible over that which is presently possessed, seen, touched, enjoyed, and used. Those who follow this line of thought are not led by the Spirit of God, which assures those it guides that, despite not seeing it, they will find the glory promised. Consequently, they place a higher value on faith than on all visible things before their eyes.

This is the true way to believe in God even though we cannot see Him. Through our confidence in Him, we find joy and peace. Because this faith is considered more precious than all worldly wealth, those who regard it as such willingly and readily seek it, as mentioned earlier. They focus their hearts on God's promises, meditating on them until all significant difficulties and doubts are removed. God, for His part, will not be unwilling to grant this to them. During their meditation, they will realize that God desires their belief just as much as they desire it. God, out of His love, entreats them and, in friendship, counsels them. With His authority to perform what He commands, He directs them to believe, showing that none has the authority to hinder or forbid it. They also understand that, having such strong encouragement, they can receive this promise in greater assurance. They recognize that they cannot be saved or happy in any other way. Consequently, they conclude that they are indeed delivered from all fear of hell and the devil. Their hearts become more humbled and meek, submitting to God's will and governance, which is essential for attaining faith.

Once a person achieves faith and confidence through these means, they must be cautious to avoid anything that might dim or extinguish its light. They should refrain from questioning and reasoning against this newfound truth, as they have yet to establish themselves and gain experience. Instead, they should follow the guidance that has brought them this far. For example, when doubts arise or lying



spirits suggest fear of falling away in the future, uncertainty about predestination, or comparisons to others who have fallen from God after an initial zeal, they should consider all such thoughts as the work of deluding and terrifying spirits, and ignore them. Since these thoughts contradict God's voice, they must not entertain them. It was Eve's first step towards her own and her descendants' ultimate downfall when she did not remain content with God's word but listened to a false and lying spirit through the serpent's mouth. Under the pretense of persuasion, this spirit covertly enticed her to eat from the forbidden tree, against God's command. Instead, she should have been shocked to hear the serpent speak at all, especially in such a manner. It is perilous to disregard God's spoken word to the extent that we dare to listen to any voice that speaks contrary to it. Eve, by listening to the serpent, went further and even engaged in conversation with him. Yet, her response neither cut him off by adhering to God's word nor referred him to her husband, who had heard God speak and received the command not to eat from that particular tree directly from God himself.

We must learn some wisdom from the Adder, which stops both her ears so she cannot hear the voice of the charmer, no matter how wisely he may charm. If any doubt troubles someone who has, through God's grace, attained this weak faith, they should seek guidance from those who have instructed them, their mentors and brethren. These individuals, who have kindly pricked and prodded, also possess the skill to heal and can help remove doubts that have arisen due to an uncertain grasp of the promise.

Furthermore, if a person who is weak in faith, even after securing a firm hold, becomes dismayed by their inability to maintain strong and steadfast faith for an extended period, feeling it wavering, they should be reminded that a child learning to walk with the aid of a

stool or bench is not as strong as one who has developed stability through long practice and custom. Similarly, weak believers experience fluctuations in their faith, but with time and the experience of their own sincerity and commitment to maintaining a good conscience, they will become well and fully established in their faith, providing great contentment and comfort.

In conclusion, despite any hindrances that may prevent people from believing, such as feeling unworthy, fearing they will revert to their old ways, or lacking constant certainty in their faith, those who earnestly desire faith will not give up entirely. In times of temptation, they should seek guidance and assistance, recognizing that they are not their own guides and must rely on help from others. They should persist and not abandon their quest until they are convinced that all doubts have been dispelled. They should not hesitate to employ any means to attain faith, such as seeking God's presence, patiently waiting for His timing, and carefully considering the encouragements and persuasions mentioned earlier. Through this process, they will establish a strong and unwavering hold on God's promises and the prayer of Christ for them, "I have prayed that your faith may not fail." Gradually, they will see themselves as part of the community of true believers, never to be cast out from it.

## **CHAP. 8:**

How the weak in faith should be established.

And now, let us address the second part of this initial discussion, focusing on how weak believers can be supported in times of intense temptation, as well as how they can demonstrate their faith despite appearing as non-believers. Among the weak, there are two distinct groups: those who are less weak and those who are more so. Both will be better understood as we discuss them separately. I urge my more firmly established brethren not to view this effort as superfluous, but rather to recall their own early struggles with weakness and recognize that the gift of faith is of the utmost importance. Therefore, we cannot offer too much guidance to the weak in helping them obtain it.

Regarding the first aspect, although I have previously provided various indicators for identifying the children of God and have explained how every faithful Christian can self-assess using these criteria, the weak, due to their inexperience and the intensity of their temptations, cannot confidently and resolutely rely on general doctrine or apply it to themselves. I refer here to those Christians who are weak but have still attained communion with their brethren in faith and godliness. While the qualities of true believers may be clearly discernible in them, and they may themselves acknowledge that they have found solace (except during times of temptation) and have often experienced profound comfort in Christ, eagerly desiring to be with Him, they are quickly discouraged and led to suspect their comfort as mere delusion. Consequently, they fall into great fear and doubt about their status as children of the Lord.

These individuals must understand that, since there is no shadow of change with God, their doubtfulness stems from their own weakness, as the Prophet candidly admitted when facing a similar ordeal after wrestling with temptation for an extended period. Those who have been firmly convinced of God's love toward them at any point in their

lives should not relinquish their confidence afterward, for it is their most valuable possession. Although this may provide some reassurance to a troubled conscience afflicted in this manner, it is essential to emphasize that they cannot find peace until their doubts, which they earnestly strive to overcome, are dispelled. They must trust that, as they labor and long to rest their weary and burdened hearts on God's promises, they will not be abandoned or fail the Lord even in their deepest distress.

While seeking relief and praying for their distressed souls to be set free by some new revelation in God's promises, they should recognize that they cannot be left to perish. Even if it seems to them that all hope has been extinguished due to the devil's fury and the strength of temptation, they should remember that someone or something will always bear witness to a testimony or characteristic of the new birth within them. This will confirm that they are living a life devoted to God, even though they may not always sense it or perceive it themselves. Thus, while they may believe that all hope is lost due to the devil's attacks and the intensity of temptation, it is as if a person is suddenly struck down by a powerful blow and stunned but eventually regains their composure. In this way, even those who do not feel they possess faith and life are not without them, as they still exhibit the work of the Spirit that invariably accompanies faith. However, they are in need of exceptional and robust comfort. This is my response.

But if this explanation does not suffice, and you still wonder why God deals with you in this manner, allowing you to sink into such depths of doubt, sorrow, and fear, even though He loves you, especially after you have felt comfort in your conscience, I must provide a more comprehensive answer to further satisfy your inquiry. I assert, therefore, that by God's wise providence, many of His truly begotten

children, who have experienced genuine comfort in Christ, do sometimes fall, and fall very dangerously. They often waver and doubt, becoming uncomfortable. The Lord permits this to prevent them from being lifted up, conceited, and subsequently becoming secure and presumptuous, which could lead to a fearful fall. Nevertheless, this weakness must be resisted and overcome.

To achieve this, the cause of this doubting in someone who has already believed must be identified and removed. This doubt often arises from our own weaknesses, neglect of duty, carelessness in the manner of performing it, or a specific sin. It can also result from a propensity for sin, its nurturing and strengthening, or long persistence in it, causing the tender conscience to fear that their previous comfort was deceptive and vain, thus casting doubt on their own salvation.

To address this issue correctly, one must consider that the strength of our Christian life is not the foundation of our comfort in Christ. Therefore, weakness in this regard should not lead to doubt about our salvation through Christ. Our comfort rests on the fact that God, who justifies the ungodly, has freely given His Son and reconciled with us, who earnestly desire His favor despite having been His enemies. He has called us through His Gospel and worked in our hearts with a firm persuasion of this, making us, who were once dead in sin, alive to God and newly born. As we gradually change, first in our affections and then in our conduct, we should not doubt our status as God's children, for the newly born can never die.

We must remember that we are children and, therefore, inherently weak. We are also susceptible to various spiritual ailments, some of which may numb our sense of life. In such cases, we must seek a cure rather than despair of life, as it is certain that none of the new birth

can perish. Thus, if we see that we have turned our hearts away from our Christian path or have offended God, we should not despair or doubt the safety of our entire being when one part or member is ailing. Instead, we should seek healing and strive to restore that part to health. Whether it is our heart, eye, hand, or any other part that has offended, we should turn to the Physician, Christ Jesus. We should express our heaviness and desire to return from our fallen state, being confident in His promise. He calls us with outstretched arms, saying, "Return, you who wander, and you who seek comfort, come to me, and I will refresh you. Believe in me, and I will satisfy your hunger." If those who have fallen and offended God can return to their first husband with a warm welcome, how much more will they be beloved by Him and comforted by Him, especially when they have not provoked Him but are only held down by fear and weakness?

And so, having addressed the doubts of God's people who are weak in faith, I had initially planned not to proceed further, but rather to expose the impostors among them. I intended to prove that many who claim to be Christians and the elect of God are, in fact, not His children. They are nothing less than pretenders, and they should not be allowed to harbor false opinions or hopes of something that is not theirs, such as the dream of happiness. However, during this time, the faithful, who had received much comfort through their hope after an effectual calling, were troubled with doubts. This reminded me of another group of God's dear servants who are even weaker, more deeply distressed, and thus deserve even more tender care. We must be cautious not to break these bruised reeds completely or extinguish the smoldering wick.

These individuals show clear signs of faith and the new birth within them. However, due to the devil's subtle and cruel malice (although

under the wise providence of the Lord, for their ultimate good and as an example to others), they are convinced that they are total reprobates and have no remedy against their despair. They feel the wrath of God burning against their souls, unbearable anguish of conscience, and despite their continuous prayers to the Lord, they see no relief. In their own judgment, they are devoid of all hope for the promised inheritance, anticipating the consummation of their misery and the dreadful sentence of eternal condemnation. While this temptation alone is enough to shake and terrify the afflicted, it becomes even more grievous when combined with melancholy. Melancholy intensifies distrust, fear, and a belief in misery where there is none, serving as a breeding ground for the devil to weaken the body and terrorize the mind with unfounded fears, disrupting the overall well-being of one's nature. One key characteristic of melancholy is to fear without just cause. I encourage those who are troubled by this latter condition to read the treatise on Melancholy written by Doctor Bright, a physician, in the year 1586. I also recommend this treatise for the former point, which deals with those deeply burdened by the conscience of sin alone and offers comfort and deliverance from it. However, since both points pertain to the subject at hand, and the other treatise may not always be readily available, I will draw partly from it, where it is extensively and profitably discussed, and add some additional insights for the support and persuasion of those weak ones whose circumstances require it.

First and foremost, they must be persuaded that they are not under the wrath of God, and His anger is not kindled against them, despite the fear oppressing them, even when their situation feels at its worst. This is because they have not sinned against the Holy Ghost, which is the only sin capable of shutting them out from hope of salvation. However, many of them in their temptation think they have

committed this sin. To prove that they have not committed that sin, it may be evident that they have not maliciously set themselves against the truth and Gospel of God, nor willfully persecuted it against their conscience. Instead, they wholeheartedly embrace it and love it, which they cannot deny. The terror and bondage that hold them in this state are merely delusions and temptations of the devil. Time will reveal and expose these deceptions, as they themselves will eventually see and understand. Many individuals in similar situations have come to this realization in the end. Although it is a temptation purposed by the enemy for their confusion, it serves as a trial of their faith, patience, and other virtues, permitted by their loving and merciful Father. The foundation of this temptation lies in their own weakness, upon which the devil preys, though not to wrest away their hope, which he will never succeed in doing, but to burden their lives with heaviness and discomfort. Satan may attempt this temptation in two ways: without means, solely through spiritual suggestions, or through means and external occasions of evil, using persuasive tactics to lead them into sin and rebellion against God. In the former case, it is certain that Satan, in a personal manner to the soul (though not in bodily form visible to the eye), tempts individuals in the secret thoughts of their hearts. As a spirit, he has access to our spirits, troubling them and disrupting their actions, just as we observe corporal creatures using physical force to harm one another. Being a spirit, he acquires a deep understanding of our minds, gathering knowledge by discerning our inclinations and wills, not that he knows our hearts (for only God can do that), but through his long familiarity with our nature, he forms conceptions of our intents and purposes, often without any outward signs of speech or gesture. Thus, since he can discern the vanity of our minds based on our universal corruption, he suggests temptations to sin and disobedience whenever he sees an opportunity and perceives our natural inclinations. If we add to this



his malice (he is not called the envious one without reason), his inscrutable subtlety, and his extraordinary strength, we should not be surprised if he raises great terror and dismay, especially when the Lord allows him to do so for our good and growth in faith. Besides tempting us to sins we naturally love, we are also tempted (especially those brought low in the anguish and bitterness of their souls) to commit evils that are very strange and abhorrent to us, ones to which we feel no inclination whatsoever. Even though we complain of great frailty, these temptations include having thoughts to blaspheme God, being tempted to harm others without any hate or malice, or even contemplating self-harm and falling into despair and distrust of God's mercy and grace. These sins, among others, are repulsive to the afflicted person, even though they have never delighted in them. While they may have been overtaken by other sins and been drawn to them, these particular sins now terrify them with guilt, even though they have always loathed them. When the devil successfully attaches himself to someone in this weakened state, he diligently works to obscure their knowledge and judgment. This way, they will have no firm grasp of any doctrinal point that could provide them with genuine comfort, allowing him to devour them like a lion even more swiftly. If they cannot be convinced in their judgment that God can or will pardon them, how can they desire or pray for it? When it is ingrained in their consciences that they have no faith and possess no better qualities than reprobates, how can they be motivated to stir up the weak faith they do have? Furthermore, how can they desire good means such as counsel, reading, or any similar activities when they have been struck by this crippling blow to their consciences, convinced that God has forsaken them?

And this is spoken of the devils tempting the children of God, when and whom the Lord pleases for their trial, even without the help of outward means or any occasions to work by. I intended to speak no

further on this matter but to provide assistance to those who are sometimes deceived and oppressed in a similar manner. This is not the appropriate place to satisfy those who seek a deeper understanding of this topic.

To continue, and bring this discussion to a conclusion: just as he often deeply ensnares the weak consciences of God's people without any means to inspire fear and dismay in them, he can achieve the same result much more easily with the assistance of external means. When he shrouds their hearts in darkness, fills them with a dreadful fear of God's wrath, and strips them of their armor, which they once used to resist him, he gains an advantage. Everything they encounter becomes a source of increased distress. If they see a knife, their thoughts turn to self-destruction; near water, they are strongly tempted to drown themselves; in the presence of a rope or cord, they contemplate hanging themselves, prompted either by the location or the instrument. Even when they sit down to eat, they believe that every morsel will add to their damnation, barely daring to consume the most meager scraps to satisfy their physical needs. When Scripture is recited to them, they dismiss it, convinced that it does not pertain to them and that they are beyond hope. No matter what response is given to them, even if it is well-suited to help and benefit them, they remain unsatisfied. Instead, they raise new objections against themselves, perpetuating their dissatisfaction with any counsel or explanation.

It would be impossible to enumerate all their statements and thoughts similar to those I have just mentioned, which the devil draws from them through such occasions as he creates. However, all of this, as we can see, is a result of them releasing their grasp on God's promises and mercies in Christ, which they had previously embraced and experienced great comfort in, or at the very least could

not deny that they had a share in. It is the immeasurable goodness of God that prevents them from being utterly consumed and preserves them through His secret grace, even though it remains unseen by them. It is also His mercy that prevents all of His dear servants from being plunged into the same depths of distrust and despair, where there would be no one to comfort or counsel another, but discouragement on all sides.

We should not attribute this preservation to Satan, his lack of subtlety, readiness to harm, ability, malice, or cruelty. Whether one group is preserved at all or another is freed from a similar degree of languishing and fear, or even from the senseless sickness and disease of this age, which is bold security and presumption, can only be attributed to the Lord's protection. As I mentioned earlier, the Lord keeps them both. It should not be surprising to us, although unbelievers may not notice it, because the Lord always watches over His beloved ones, as David says in Psalm 41:12: "And as for me, you uphold me in my integrity, and you set me in your presence forever." It is just as a mother keeps a watchful eye on a young child who is learning to walk, ensuring that the child does not stumble and get hurt.

But now, to conclude, you may wonder what remedies can be employed against such severe assaults. First, I say that since their consciences bear witness to how much these temptations are contrary to their desires and preferences, primarily orchestrated and instigated by Satan, who exploits their simplicity, there is no reason for them to be so discouraged and disheartened, as if they had taken pleasure in offending God. They should take note of this, as soon as they are capable of hearing it. Moreover, they should consider these temptations to be more from Satan than from themselves, especially because they are entirely contrary to their previous conduct and even

to human nature itself. Such temptations have no source or allurements other than from him. Furthermore, they should contemplate how displeasing it is to God that they have been led away from their faith and have given in to the spirit of error. Therefore, they should gather greater godly boldness and confidence in Him on one side and greater strength against Satan on the other side. If God calls and encourages us to trust and believe in Him, and we, recognizing our need, would gladly embrace His promises in Christ Jesus, who would dare hinder us? If the Lord justifies and clears us, who can condemn us? After all this, they should not continue to object that they feel little strength of faith and hope, as many of God's dear children do. By doing so, they give the enemy an advantage, to their own detriment. What if they do not presently experience the sweet taste of faith and hope, which they once enjoyed? Should they then conclude that they have been entirely deprived of it? If the soul is currently sick and cannot taste the sweet consolations it once knew, was it always this way? Should they judge themselves based on their current feelings, when their souls have lost their taste? Or should they measure themselves by past times, as the Prophet encourages them to do in similar situations, recalling those moments when they were free from the disease of temptation and found comfort in the Spirit through an acceptable measure of faith?

Additionally, they should evaluate their faith based on the fruits that are evident to the eyes of others, who can assess more impartially than those afflicted individuals themselves, whose understanding has been greatly altered by the terrors imposed by Satan. As a suitable example, consider the strong faith of the Canaanite woman when Christ appeared to reject her entirely. Yet, she refused to be swayed from her faith even when faced with multiple fiery darts one after another. The same applies to other objections of a similar nature. For instance, when they reason against themselves that they do not live

as God's children should, nor as holily as God requires, and therefore they cannot experience the same comfort as before, what then? Does that make them reprobates? Are they without grace because they lack what they desire? They should consider that, as the Lord's plants, they do not reach full maturity all at once. Instead, like plants, they require daily watering and nurturing to eventually grow to full maturity in Christ. If they do not feel the testimony of God's Spirit, which could assure them, they should remember that none of God's children feel it at all times. God sometimes hides Himself for a season, as a mother does from her child to test their affection, causing them to more earnestly long for His usual grace. When they regain it, they can praise Him with greater joy in their hearts. God does not withhold comfort from His children, even when they walk through heavy trials. If they believe Him, they can rest assured that they are safe under His protection all day long. However, their own weakness and the intensity of the temptation that oppresses them may diminish their sense of God's presence. But patience, perseverance, and a resolute determination to endure God's trials will yield a positive outcome. In this way, they will gain experience and be better prepared to face greater trials in the future. Even amid these trials, they can maintain hope that will not put them to shame.

In conclusion, it is evident that although the weak faith of God's dear servants may be assailed in many ways, and their salvation may seem doubtful to them due to their feelings, they are undoubtedly the Lord's. They cannot be taken out of His hands because they are not devoid of faith, as I have demonstrated. They apprehend Christ, albeit weakly, and this faith has brought them much comfort in the past. Even though, for a season, the Lord seems to work against them, He is, in fact, working all things for their good. This may suffice for the first part of the second head of this treatise, which

addresses how the weakest of God's people can be supported during vehement temptations.

## **CHAP. 9:**

### The Difference of Believers from Those Who Are Not

Now, let's proceed to the second point. To make what has been said clearer, I must now distinguish those who appear to be faithful believers but are not, from the weakest Christians I have mentioned. I will demonstrate that the latter group's condition is markedly different from the former, who, among unbelievers, are the closest to believers. I will also address some doubts that may arise in the minds of various individuals regarding this matter.

First, some may wonder why I did not rest in the description of God's children with infallible marks, namely:

1. Sorrow for their misery
2. Confession of their sins to God
3. Fear of His displeasure for the same
4. Desiring some kind of amendment of life

Especially since these qualities are found in those who are effectually called by God. My response is that I have followed the Scriptures in this matter. In describing who belongs to the Lord, I have focused more on the graces of God that are properly associated with the faithful rather than on those that may exist in hypocrites and insincere professing Christians. We find both in Scripture and

through experience that these aforementioned affections, as commendable as they may seem, can exist in individuals who do not belong to God's elect. A person may be deeply burdened by the weight of their sins, have a conscience troubled by the spirit of bondage, be remorseful for their sins, wish they were undone, fear punishment, promise amendment, walk heavily, and express their sorrow outwardly, yet remain unreleased and unliberated from their fears. Similarly, an individual may experience joy and delight upon hearing the promises of the Gospel, take pleasure in religious exercises, taste a glimpse of eternal life (as Balaam did), show reverence and fear toward God's ministers (like Herod), and even begin to improve certain faults in their life (as did Herod and others mentioned in the Gospel). However, despite all these outward signs, they may not be sealed unto salvation. This is how far one can go in the profession of Christian religion without possessing true faith, the life of godliness, and the accompanying good and peaceful conscience.

Regarding this topic, there has been much written and extensively discussed, especially in places where the Gospel has been preached (some of which I can speak of from my own knowledge). Therefore, I need not say much more on this matter. I do not bring up this point to discourage anyone but to encourage them to refrain from self-deception. Some people prefer to cling to a shaky and fragile foundation, not caring on what they rely, and this serves as a warning against such behavior. Additionally, I hope to emphasize the value of true testimonies of eternal life to those who possess them and to motivate those who do not to diligently seek them. Even the weakest faith finds in Christ Jesus someone who will not cast them aside, as He has said that He will not break a bruised reed or extinguish the smoking flax. On the other hand, the most impressive displays of godliness and the boldest claims and boasts of faith,

where true faith is lacking, will all eventually fade away and amount to nothing. They will have no part in Christ, just as Saul's boasts that God had delivered David into his hands while he was trapped in the city were ultimately proven false and brought shame upon him (1 Samuel 23:14; 24:5). This truth is not only evident from examples in Scripture but also from the lives of many individuals in the countryside. They initially received the Gospel with joy but were greatly affected by the demands of the law. Their humbling experience was short-lived, akin to a bulrush bending in the wind, and their joy was a fleeting burst of mirth, not deeply rooted within them. It was an enlightenment with general knowledge of salvation rather than an enduring seal of assurance in their hearts.

Oh, how many, upon hearing the reports of the great change brought about by the Gospel, have flocked to listen to it and given hopeful signs of their own repentance and transformation! Yet, they soon grew weary of the Lord's yoke and being subject to His holy rule. How many have abandoned the fountains of the water of life that could have refreshed their souls with profound comfort in times of need, only to dig broken cisterns that cannot hold water? They have strayed like a broken bow and shamefully returned to their former vomit, like a washed sow wallowing in the mire. I speak of this not to imply that God has not called out many among us, even within Her Majesty's reign, who displayed great promise and left a comforting legacy among us, while others continue to emerge. However, I mention this to highlight the shame of those who have fallen from their fervent desire for the sincere milk of the Word and returned to the world, profanity, and carelessness.

These individuals (as the Scripture says of Judas) departed from our fellowship because they were not truly one of us. If they were genuinely part of us, they would have remained with us. When they



experienced prosperity, they became indulgent and perverted the grace of God into licentiousness. In times of affliction, they wearied of their profession, echoing the sentiment found in Ecclesiastes 7:12, that the former days were better. They longed for the merry world they once enjoyed and the pleasant life they lived in ignorance of God and its lusts. Consequently, they fell away from the grace of God and departed from Him, to whom they had professed infinite indebtedness, especially for His Gospel, which had delighted them for a season. When I consider their treachery toward God and their double-dealing, refusing to give their hearts entirely to Him to believe in His mercies as their sole treasure, and to retain their confidence in Him, who would have richly rewarded their renunciation of the world, I cease to marvel at their actions. Although they have fallen from a position of high esteem among God's servants to a vile and disgraceful state, counted among unbelievers, I will not cease to implore the Lord daily that if any of them belong to Him, He would awaken them and bring them back like the prodigal son, before the eyes of those who witnessed their departure. In this way, not only they may be saved, though they endure shame in the world, but also others who were emboldened to sin by their example may be reclaimed.

The love for these individuals has compelled me to digress a bit to lament their misery because I have known many who once shone as lights for a season but have become obscure clouds hindering light from reaching others. I counsel them to consider that they were not driven away from their holy profession by persecution, which might have offered better hope for their weakness, but they left their first love and severed their fellowship with their brethren, even during the flourishing of the Gospel when it was preached with greater power than when they were initially stirred to embrace it. Some of them abandoned their promising beginnings not when Moses was absent

from them for forty days but while he was among them, in the midst of their tents, exhorting them to remain steadfast and advance, as he had done long before. Therefore, given the magnitude of their sin, they should seek greater assurance of their salvation and seek forgiveness and righteousness through free imputation by Jesus Christ. They should expect God's healing for their diseases, the expulsion of their sorrow and doubts, and true comfort through their faith in Him, which would have worked so effectively within them, stirring unfeigned love for God that would prevent any reason for them to withdraw. Instead, they would have pursued godliness alongside their brethren rather than returning to their former ignorance and lusts, from which they claimed to have been purged.

I have written this for those who have been content to be deceived with an opinion of happiness but are void of it. They have experienced some light in recognizing their sins and have been wounded in conscience due to the guilt and impending punishment of their sins. Consequently, they have convinced themselves that they have been effectually called, although they have not experienced the pardon of their sins, a change in their will, affections, and conduct, or become new creatures. While they rightly point out that the conversion of Paul, the people in Acts 2:37, and the return of the people of Israel to God during the time of the Judges and Samuel involved trouble of mind, pricking of conscience, and self-abasement, which are indeed wrought in those who are truly penitent, these experiences are accompanied by an earnest hunger for God's mercy, genuine faith, the sealing of the spirit of adoption confirming their salvation, and the evident fruits of these graces. These individuals believe that God, through Christ Jesus, has become their loving Father, no longer a fearsome judge, compelling them to love Him and earnestly seek to please Him with all their hearts, thus propelling them into a godly life befitting their profession.

However, these people do not equip themselves with faith, a pure heart, a good conscience, and a transformed life driven by love for God. Instead, they allow time to heal their mental distress, and their wounds of conscience are superficially healed with the belief that sorrow alone suffices as repentance. Some, unable to endure the grip of grief, discard it only to face recurring bouts of affliction, as these wounds were never truly dealt with in a proper and effective manner. If they argue that they believed their course was just in being cast down because the law was preached to them, which compelled them to do so, and question why we preached God's judgments to them if it wasn't appropriate for them to be humbled, I respond by saying that the law was never preached alone by any wise teacher who understood his duty, always accompanied by the Gospel. Furthermore, the law is not preached to hold people in fear and bondage, but to help them see their sins more clearly, recognize the deserved punishment, and subsequently come to a genuine realization of their condition and the immeasurable value of God's mercy and Christ's merits. These alone can save their souls and provide true comfort. We have never, on God's behalf, endorsed or encouraged anyone to rest in the works of the law or their best actions when they lack faith and the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins. Rather, we urge them to quickly move away from that position, test themselves against the rules and doctrines, and examine their own experiences to determine if Christ dwells within them, that they may become acceptable through Him.

If they have heard and accepted one part of our ministry but not the other, if they have placed their happiness in imagined repentance rather than in the knowledge of God through Christ that we have emphasized, they have been deceived by the cunning of the tempter. If they have sought to please God out of fear of His wrath rather than because they have found deliverance from death through His

undeserved favor, they have labored in vain, missing out on the primary fruit of the preached Gospel. Many are the deceitful ways by which the devil maintains his hold on those who have not yet escaped his snares, all of which they allow willingly. He discourages some from having hope and confidence in the Lord's election because they have experienced deeper conviction for their sins and prolonged uncertainty compared to other believers. However, isn't it through these afflictions that they are drawn closer to God? On the other hand, he disheartens others by suggesting that their state cannot be good because they haven't experienced the same deep sorrow or prolonged suffering for their sins as some of their brethren. He leads them to rely on examples of men rather than following God's Word as their guide. Still, he whispers to some that their condition cannot be favorable because they haven't faced a lifetime of external trials like some of the godly. Conversely, many have been held captive by the thought that they cannot belong to God's election because they are perpetually under some form of trial. In these ways, the devil keeps them occupied with these and similar concerns that are not the main points to focus on as if their happiness depends on them, but they may miss out on eternal life despite all their efforts.

For neither does this commend a man to God, whether he has long endured grief of mind, fear of conscience, and uncertainty about salvation. Rather, what truly matters is that he has been genuinely freed from such turmoil and released from his fear. I mean that he can wholeheartedly thank God through Jesus Christ for seeing and feeling that he is set at liberty and made happy by Him. If the truth of God and His promise set him free, then he is truly free. Moreover, this doesn't affect a man, for or against, in assuring himself of salvation, whether his life is filled with afflictions and crosses, as God does not always deal evenly in these matters; they are common to

both the good and the bad. What matters is that a man, though a wretched sinner, knows himself to be justified and acquitted before God through faith. Therefore, he is at peace with God in himself, a peace that surpasses all understanding, whether his crosses are many or few.

Satan employs various tactics to obscure the hope of many, such as convincing them that because they have some infirmities or have experienced some falls, they cannot be beloved by God. When they manage to overcome these weaknesses to some extent, they then think they are beloved by God. A man should not base his safety on either of these premises. For even the beloved saints of God may possibly be led astray to commit something offensive. Furthermore, one should not presume well of himself simply because he manages to avoid sins at times when he has previously fallen into them. There may be various reasons for this, such as the absence of strong temptations in that regard, busyness in other matters that prevent him from being easily led astray, or the presence of other equally grievous sins that keep him occupied. Therefore, many are deceived in this way, partly due to a lack of knowledge and solid judgment in the truth and partly because they have been trapped in such snares through long-standing habits. They should be strongly encouraged to devote some of their time and thoughts to the essence and core of their happiness, ensuring that they genuinely have a part in it. As Saint Peter says, they should make every effort to confirm their calling and election. They should use all means to test whether their faith, hope, patience, and love are sound, even if imperfect, and genuine and effective, even if weak and feeble, for these are the crucial factors.

If they can ascertain that the Spirit of God has poured such grace into their hearts since they heard His Gospel preached to them, making

them partakers of its fruits, they need not be troubled about the rest. However, if they find that they still lack these qualities, they must fully resolve to seek them and not delude themselves with vain and groundless hope.

And here, I must further request that those to whom God imparts His Spirit's work, and whose hearts He seasons with good affections and desires through the Gospel, making them sensibly aware of their pursuit of eternal life, should cherish and value these holy sparks of grace ignited within them. While these sparks are warm, they should kindle them further through fervent prayer and fan them into flames through acquaintanceship, companionship, and conversations with others who have experienced similar things, perceiving that God has worked these same things in them, often to a greater degree. They should always hold God's gifts in high regard so that they may receive more from Him quickly, making the things they currently see dimly clearer, resolving their doubts, and finding encouraging reasons to move forward. Above all, they must diligently attend to the doctrine of faith and godliness where it is soundly preached, for this is the most crucial and necessary thing. They should assure themselves that if they do not love it above all else, as Mary did (Luke 10:42), they do not truly love it, and consequently, they will not have a share in it. However, they should also know that God, who shows kindness and love to those who do not seek Him (as it is written, "I was found by those who did not seek me"), will not hide Himself from those who seek Him, even though He finds them in their filth when He calls them to repentance, even the best among them. Ultimately, they should wait upon Him, desiring that in His own time (despite their unworthiness) He will draw them to Him by His secret grace. But this will suffice to address those who consider themselves Christians but are not, and those who have abandoned their initial love for the Gospel and for their brethren, which they

once had, though they were never truly believers. These two groups, who appear to be among the most zealous of professing Christians but are not truly so, serve to confirm the standing of weak servants of God, who are approved by Him and are happy, though quite different from the former. While I have spoken about them along the way to admonish both, my primary and most important intention has been to uphold and comfort God's weak servants. They may see His love and graciousness even in their lowliness and humility, which they once thought to be their utter and extreme misery. This concludes my discussion of the second point of the second part or general topic: namely, the steadfastness of weak Christians and how they differ from unbelievers.

In this first part, I have not written as I would have liked, but to the best of my abilities, I have set forth my thoughts to illustrate who the true people of God are. I have provided reasons for many who, in truth, have little claim to this great inheritance, encouraging them to ponder their state more deeply and seriously than they have done. If these individuals, who are almost Christians and are not far from eternal life, many of whom regularly attend sermons, would inquire about their condition until they are satisfied, just as I am confident that others can be well-supported by what I have written, I would be greatly comforted. It is my fervent prayer that they do so for their own good. How unwise it is for them to be careless about such a weighty matter as their salvation while being so diligent in transient matters. They should not expect to find true comfort while remaining uncertain about their assurance of salvation, which, if they miss out on it, would mean their eternal and perpetual desolation. However, they hope that they are in good standing and convince themselves that they are in a state of grace. I am far from envying them; rather, I wish that I could hope the same for myself. But what evidence or proof do they have of their condition? Their answer is none, except

that they profess Christ, love the Gospel, and reject Popery. They frequently attend sermons and do not think well of those who do not. Some of the more enthusiastic among them are convinced at times that they believe and rejoice in it, even shedding tears during a sermon. Yet their anchor is found in these experiences, which they cling to for a long time. But when they have been at their best, have they gone further to inquire whether these things are sufficient marks and testimonies of their salvation? If not, have they sought to discover what is sufficient? Do they continue to examine their state until they can prove that it is indeed good? And have they found rest for their souls that cannot deceive them? No, they have not reached this point at all, nor have they applied Christ to themselves, for this study is utterly unwelcome and unpalatable to them. They can do anything but that. Why is that? It is because they want to remain deceived. Just as individuals with legal disputes often boast about their case but are hesitant to go to trial, these individuals are reluctant to pursue this matter to its conclusion. Why are they afraid to do so? Because they know they lack the evidence to prove their case.

They may be compared in this to King Nebuchadnezzar: he was very eager to hear the interpretation of his dream and could not be satisfied until he heard it. However, that was not all he needed to do. When he realized that God gave him twelve months to repent of his pride (for which his dream indicated that his kingdom would depart from him), he forgot his dream as if it were just a dream. He did not repent; instead, at the end of twelve months, he began to increase his pride, boasting about his wealth and honor, saying, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" This shows us that he was more interested in knowing the meaning of his dream than in taking it as a warning. Similarly, these professing Christians I am



talking about are very eager to hear the good news of the Gospel preached and cannot be dissuaded from it. However, they are unwilling to align their lives with it, to heed the warning it contains, and to allow it to shape their hearts and actions. They will not allow themselves to be transformed by it, for then they would discover it to be the power of salvation to them, for which purpose it is preached.

But what is the reason that, despite going further than many other professing Christians, they cannot surpass them in examining whether Christ is in them, lest they be reprobates? Why can't they determine whether they possess the Spirit of God, without whom they do not belong to Him? The main reason is this: their hearts are not sincere, and they are not straightforward with the Lord. They cannot honestly say, "Search me, O Lord, and see if there is any unrighteousness in me, which I hide within me, and it shall be removed from your sight." Indeed, if they were put to the test, it would become clear that they keep some sin hidden within them, as Job says, like a child hides sugar under its palate. They may avoid certain faults and keep them out of their families, but they are not willing to make a profession of their readiness to be reformed in any part of their lives where they may be justly challenged. For if they were to do so, they believe it would tarnish their religion, even though the best among them do the same.

Furthermore, they do not always prioritize their privileges under the Gospel. They think it is too strict to be so narrowly bound. They consider it neither wise nor respectable, nor in keeping with civility, policy, gravity, or their social standing and positions, to reveal what is within them, even though they are zealous. They find it beneath them. However, the Scriptures say, "I believe, and therefore I have spoken." They also proclaim, "The zeal of your house has consumed me." Additionally, they believe it is unnecessary for them to take all

their delight in the saints on earth and to associate with those who fear God. They view it as too lowly a pursuit. Yet the communion of saints is more pleasant and sweet than Aaron's anointing oil and more fruitful than Mount Hermon with its dew or Zion and her valleys with the silver drops that fell on them. The Church cherished it so highly that it declared, "If I do not prefer Jerusalem, that is, the welfare of God's people, above all the joy I have on earth, then let me lose my greatest delight."

To return to those of whom I speak, though in their own opinion and in the judgment of some others, they are in a right good state with God: yet God, whose thoughts are not as man's, and the truth which must give a good report of them, as well as men, judges and determines them far differently if that is the best that can be said of their faith and repentance, which I have set down. For the elect and dear children of God act far differently. They, having found the pearl, sell all they have to buy it; though they are occupied with many things, yet that one thing (the word of God) is chief with them. Their love for it is as strong as jealousy, admitting no recompense, and as death that cannot be resisted. They do not cast away their confidence when they see what recompense of reward it holds. They will not allow anyone to take their crown from them, the honor they have in being the Lord's sons and daughters. They covet spiritual things, hunger and thirst after righteousness, receive the word with good and honest hearts, and bring forth fruit in due season. If they have offended their most loving Father, they cannot be at peace until they return and come home again, confessing, "We have sinned." Even in a worse state than this, they do not like it, except when they have fallen asleep and forgotten themselves.

And yet, what more do they do than they ought? Despite all this, they feel their wants and burdens about which they complain and cry out.

When they carry themselves with a greater love for heavenly things and a more fervent hope of immortality than those who are not entitled to such blessings, they are mocked and spoken ill of. It is hard to say whether those who offer them this injury offend more against the honor of God, their neighbor's welfare, or their own salvation. For God commands us to labor for the food that endures to eternal life rather than that which perishes. What then offends us when we do so? Is it not our gain and benefit? Therefore, let people, for shame and fear of just damnation, desist from such madness.

But to return to those to whom I speak, and to conclude in a sentence or two to them and those like them: I say, give yourselves no rest until you can prove that you are in a state of salvation. There are many ways set down in this treatise and in the labors of other godly men, especially in the Scriptures, by which you can do it. Do not let all your labor, the reading, hearing of sermons, praying, and confessing your sins, be in vain (it is lost if you do not attain what you seek). You are not far from it; a little more humility and truth of heart will bring you further into the state of happiness than you can fall away from it. Never be satisfied until you have more than an unrepentant person can have. You consider it no toil to sweat in hay and harvest; this is another manner of substance. If you once have a part in it, you will not forgo your portion for a kingdom. And know this from me, who am not ashamed to have given you this counsel: I know what I am saying in thus provoking and persuading you. If you refuse, never expect to receive a similar offer. To all of you who desire salvation, no matter how far off you may be, know that you are in the state of devils if you continue as you are. The longer you live, the more likely you are to remain that way if you continue to refuse while being called. You are like outlaws; God's care does not reach you, and you are not under His protection, being His enemies. But He or one of His sergeants will arrest you when you least expect it,

and hell will receive you, while the happiness that others will have will elude you. May God forbid it.

## **CHAP. 10:**

### Of the Eight Companions of Faith

Now I have spoken of those who are weakest in faith, with the smallest measure of it, and have labored to support them in their temptation. I have also shown the causes of their conversion, the love of God the Father in giving His Son, the love of the Son in reconciling them to God, and delivering them from all their misery. The word of promise is preached to bring them tidings of this, and God's Spirit assures them by working faith in them and persuasion thereof. To this end, I have set down these because in the ordinary journey to eternal life, there is no other way. Yet, since these are not as easily felt by us as they are sure and infallible grounds in themselves to us of salvation, I will add some other effects or rather properties of true faith, which accompany the assurance of the love of God and of Christ Jesus in us. These are the works or fruits of the Holy Ghost through the Gospel, which, although they do not possess the same authority as the former, are more easily felt to be in us. By combining both sorts of evidence, meeting and concurring in one and the same person, one can clearly understand that God has graciously bestowed and we may effectively receive and hold faith as our own, with increasing certainty every day as our salvation draws nearer than when we first believed. Thus, I come to the third general part of this treatise, in which, hoping the weakest believers are somewhat

comforted by what I have said already, I intend to show how all of God's people, who are freed from strong fear and trouble of mind, may, through other clear evidences, obtain further proof and trial of their faith, preserve and confirm it, and realize how much such a state is to be desired for the benefits it brings. First, I will teach the believer to try that he possesses this excellent gift of faith, as these eight graces accompanying it are more easily perceived and discerned than faith itself and will clearly testify to its presence wherever they are found.

Therefore, this true believer, whoever he may be, as soon as he perceives that God, far otherwise than he expected, has given him His Son to bring life unto him and to be his wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, must feel in his heart great joy and comfort. We see this in the example of the Ethiopian eunuch when Philip converted him; he went away rejoicing (Acts 8:39). Likewise, in Samaria, when Philip preached Christ and brought them to repentance, there was great joy in the city (Acts 8:8). What marvel is it that a man, who is persuaded by good and infallible grounds that greater happiness is given him by God than all the world is worth, rejoices with unspeakable joy, as those who dream? Can a person be so senseless that if he were to receive some material goods, worth, let's say, a hundred pounds annually, he would not feel his heart filled with joy? How much more joy must fill the heart of someone who understands that they are highly favored by the Lord of heaven and earth, transformed from a child of wrath into an heir of heaven forever? Can this honor befall anyone without causing exceeding gladness in their heart, which cannot be expressed? As in the case of the eunuch mentioned earlier, immediately after he was instructed in this mystery of faith, he went on his way rejoicing. Similarly, Paul was marvelously comforted soon after his conversion, though he had previously been as far from it and as deeply cast down as anyone. Let

it not be doubted that when God enlightens the heart of someone who had been in darkness to see that they are undoubtedly saved, it raises up in them joy unspeakable, glorious in their measure, just as in the parable of the man who found the pearl. However, do common professors or worldlings manifest such joy when they clearly show that they are disinterested in this message? So, it should not be doubted that once God has enlightened the heart of anyone who had previously sat in darkness to see themselves undoubtedly saved, it will raise up in them joy unspeakable, glorious in their measure.

Indeed, it shall not perhaps be seen or appear to another as it is felt by oneself. Neither shall a stranger, a person with different affections, partake in this joy. It accompanies those who are assured of their election through faith. Our Savior Christ teaches this, saying, "Rejoice not that the spirits are subdued unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

And when it may be objected that this joy is severely shaken and lessened by afflictions, let that not trouble anyone. For no affliction in the present moment is joyous but grievous. Yet, we rejoice in them through hope, and that hope makes us unashamed (Rom. 5:4). Besides, we have it here but in part, just like all other graces. Affliction, after we have been exercised with it rightly, will ultimately increase our joy. God's former graces will be restored to us, which we once found in Him. Therefore, Saint Peter says, "Though you have not seen, yet you love Him. In whom, though you see Him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable." So, it must be this way, proving that the common opinion of faith, which most hold where the Gospel is preached, deceives them and is far from true. If they were persuaded of their happiness, how could they not feel their souls more joyful and glad within them than all the commodities of this life could make them? For as soon as we know ourselves justified

before God by faith, we are at peace with Him, and it's a peace that surpasses all understanding. Once we taste its sweetness and preciousness, we will never want to let it go again, although, for lack of stronger faith and sounder knowledge, it may be fleeting for some. Yet, even that causes them to complain until they are enlarged. Those who lack this witness within them should not deceive themselves with a vain confidence. In conclusion, joy and peace are inseparable companions of faith.

Now, I can hear some objecting, saying, "You zealous people, who boast so much about the assurance of salvation and are therefore joyful, don't agree with each other. Some who share your views are always sad and sorrowful." To this, I answer that many desire assurance and earnestly seek it from the Lord. In time, they shall be comforted and have already been pronounced blessed. Sometimes, they are assured for a season and then become cheerful. Before this, they cannot be as cheerful as those whose hearts the Lord has opened more clearly to understand this excellent mystery. Furthermore, it should not trouble anyone to see them mourn for a while after attaining something that will make them joyful forever after. Those who criticize God's weak servants for their doubts, while desiring nothing more than assurance, do so unjustly. If their heaviness leads to melancholy or makes them touchy, irritable, froward, restless, or quick to judge those who are not in their condition, such mad and frantic emotions should be condemned. However, objectors claim that the somber countenance and behavior of more religious individuals than most often cause many to avoid religion and be afraid to associate with them, engage in the study of Scriptures, or ponder sermons beyond mere listening or reading. To this, I say that we should not let examples prevent us from obtaining the benefits that Scriptures clearly direct us toward. Those who readily criticize many good Christians for their heaviness, even

though it leads to seeking comfort, may see their own fault as greater. Often, their mirth is accompanied by levity and profanity, which excludes goodness and grace from their company. Without knowing God to be their most loving Father, their joy is mere folly or even madness, as Solomon speaks of laughter signifying such joy. In conclusion, let those with true hope in God, even if weak, moderate their heaviness to avoid offending others as much as possible. Those who find fault with them should rather pity and pray for them, interpret their actions in the best light, and ensure their own mirth and cheerfulness is well grounded; otherwise, it would be better for them to partake in the heaviness of others.

But to proceed, the due consideration of the greatness and certainty of His benefits will not only raise joy in the heart of the one who possesses it but also cause him to marvel with reverence at the change in his state. He has been brought from a low depth of extreme misery to a high degree of honor and glory, enriched by God's favor. Such a person may often fear on the sudden that it may not be so, wondering at the greatness of it, just as Judas, the good Apostle, did when he considered Christ's great kindness, exclaiming, "Lord, what is the cause that thou wilt reveal thyself to us, and not to the world?" Similarly, the woman of Samaria, who had long lived in blindness and superstition, was converted and so deeply moved by the benefits she received from our Savior that she forgot her water-pot (a significant matter for one who previously focused only on earthly things). She went, filled with wonder at her own transformation, to tell her neighbors the good news, which led to their conversion as well (John 4:28-29). Saul's conversion caused him to wonder at God's work, amazing those who witnessed it when they saw him preaching the doctrine he had previously opposed (Acts 9:21). This precious faith works such great admiration in those who obtain it.



If this holy and reverent admiration for these great blessings were felt only immediately after receiving them, it might make the benefits seem smaller. However, it is quite the opposite when it is nurtured and sustained. These blessings are so sweet and far beyond what one can ask or hope for that they remain new and fresh every day. Instead of becoming tedious, the more they are considered daily and the longer they are enjoyed, the more they cause wonder at the love of the giver. It leads to contemplation on why God would bestow such a great portion, even more valuable than the whole world, upon such an unworthy individual who, not long before, would have considered it a happy state not to exist at all. Just as the beauty and strength of the Sun can dazzle the eye, the contemplation and beholding of the glory that God shares with His beloved ones astonishes and overwhelms the heart. This is so true that David, a man of God, fell into holy admiration many years after he felt beloved by God, wondering how God could do such great things for his soul, including delivering him from the depths of the grave, which he equated with hell.

It is undoubtedly the work of Satan bewitching many professors that they may marvel a little when they first hear this news but then think they have received this benefit with the reverence it deserves, even as it becomes a common thing for them later on. They say it would be foolish to wonder at the same thing daily as they did when they first heard of it. However, those who think this way reveal what little fruit they reap from it. If they considered their unworthiness daily, they would find more reason to wonder every day than they did initially. It is truly astonishing that God daily forgives sins, for His mercy endures daily to pardon them. His mercy is both great and enduring. Reflecting on our own slips and rebellions, which daily provoke God's righteous wrath, and considering the fear and consequences they might bring, we may still come to God for refuge through Christ

without fear, as if we had not sinned. We can hold fast our confidence that God still loves us. This should leave us astounded at the extent of His kindness. When a wretched person, no better than ourselves, must be entreated and pacified with gifts, and yet can hardly be restrained from causing us harm, imprisonment, or death when displeased, it is a cause to magnify God's loving kindness forever, for it endures forever (Psalm 118:4). Although natural reason, even our own flesh, plays a significant role in this matter, we are not indebted to it. As long as we live, we have ample reason to magnify God's loving kindness.

Although I confess that in nature, a man may not always admire the greatness of some rare deliverance or fortunate state that initially raised great admiration, it should be different for a spiritual man, a believing Christian. Such a person, having the loving countenance of God shining daily upon him, which is an invaluable treasure, should wonder at the continuation of it. This is especially true because, by provoking the Lord with his sins daily renewed, he might fear that the former comforts he had enjoyed could be turned into great sorrows and his light into darkness, rather than continued and multiplied. However, unless through unthankfulness, which is the corruption of nature leading him thereto, he buries these blessings in oblivion and becomes overly attached to temporary and worldly things, setting the creature before the Creator and the gift before the giver, he may indeed slacken his marveling at God's kindness, which is most precious. On the other hand, if he keeps his focus on God's eternal favor, he will be able to value and prioritize it above all transient things. This is the second companion of faith: holy admiration of the greatness of God's kindness.

To keep this brief, as I have intended to provide only a concise overview of the heavenly companions that accompany faith, leaving

further meditation to the devout reader, another companion is heartfelt and unfeigned love. This love, when felt by the one who experiences God's love shed into his heart, is returned to God. Although many boldly claim to have this love for God before they have found and felt themselves to be beloved by Him, the Scripture teaches us otherwise. It reminds us that we have not loved Him first; rather, He has loved us first. When we see the great things God has done for us, delivering us from dreadful bondage and restoring us to gracious liberties and privileges by forgiving all our sins, we have ample reason to say, "I love the Lord, because He has done such great things for my soul." We are affected like the woman who, knowing that many sins have been forgiven us, realizes that we must love much. While we were once lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, now that we have experienced God's bountifulness and the emptiness of our worldly delights, our hearts are set more on God than on the best pleasures we once enjoyed.

Before this transformation, we may have loved father, mother, friends, and possessions more than God when we were merely natural. However, now that we know God, or rather, are known by God, we hold Him as our chief treasure. Our spiritual kinship with Jesus Christ has bound us to Him with a much stronger bond of love. Therefore, we find our rest, joy, and satisfaction in Him. This will always be the case, without weariness, for there is no end to His bounty and kindness; His mercy endures forever. Anyone can see that such infinite love from God to us may provoke and inspire in us genuine love for Him in return, filling us with His fullness. Those who challenge us for doing so should understand that they do not know the love of our well-beloved. Our well-beloved is the chiefest of ten thousand, wholly delectable, with His head as fine gold, and more. However, it must be said that unless we have tasted of this love, our love towards Him will remain cold. This can be seen too

commonly in many who worship God but cannot forsake their vile lusts, despite boasting of God's love and mercy.

But to continue, where all these aforementioned qualities are found, how can there be anything but unfeigned thankfulness and acknowledgment of this gift from God, to His great praise? When we consider what He has done for our souls and how much solace He has filled our lives with, which would otherwise be full of deadness or deceitful and unsavory folly, it should naturally evoke such affections in us as were in the man of God mentioned in Psalm 116:12: "What shall I give unto the Lord for all His mercies? I will praise His name before His congregation and commit myself wholly to His government hereafter, who heretofore has regarded me so graciously." We will be daily provoked to honor Him, to sing new songs of praise to Him, knowing that His kindness and goodness are renewed daily upon us. Thus, we shall view His first reception of us as only the beginning of our happiness. Consequently, our hearts, exercised daily in praise and thanksgiving, will see more cause for gratitude with each passing day. We shall remain thankful in all circumstances, even in our troubles, as it is written, "In all things be thankful."

While the world may see no other cause for complaint and anger in their afflictions, we will see God's favor even in them, knowing that they, as well as blessings, work for our good. Therefore, we shall praise God even for our troubles, for it befits the righteous, who understand why they are led to do so. It is the love of God that compels us, enlarges our hearts toward Him, and provides us with reasons and opportunities to sing and make melody to the Lord and to praise Him, both individually and in the company of the righteous. It is no surprise, considering that without the sweet aroma of His love, we would be utterly sluggish and far from any such

contemplation. Therefore, it is understandable that continual and frequent thoughts of God's kindness should make us thankful. For example, we observe how a poor man becomes so servile and willing to serve a benefactor who has provided even a small favor, to the point of being willing to lay down his life for him (Romans 5:7), showing that the borrower becomes a servant to the lender.

These aforementioned affections, which accompany faith in us, acquire such taste and sweetness in God, as He acquaints us with His fatherly kindness and bounty. We find no such well-being in any other state of existence and begin to desire to be with Him, to see His glory, and long for His blessed presence. We desire nothing more than to be unburdened from this earthly tabernacle, this prison of our bodies, and to be with Christ in order to see His glory. Deep consideration and certain trial lead us to resolve that if we were given a choice of whatever we might wish, one day spent in sweet communion with God and devoted to His service (as our frailty is capable of achieving) is better than a thousand days filled with all varieties of earthly pleasures. If His favor is so greatly desired here, where we only see dimly, and His benefits bestowed upon His beloved ones are so sweet while we are but strangers, imagine how much more wonderful our state will be when we see Him in His majesty as He truly is, and when we enjoy the pleasures of His house in fullness forever.

Yes, if here, in this vale of misery, God reveals His bounty toward us, how much more glorious will our estate be when we rest from our labors and experience fullness of joy with God at His right hand forever? The belief and contemplation of this truth has led God's beloved servants to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," and, "I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ."

And if this heavenly affection and holy desire are companions to true faith, it may be wondered where their faith has gone, and why it lies dormant, in those who make such little haste to go home and have so little desire to be with Christ in His Father's house, where they can see His glory. It appears as though they cannot bear to hear of departing there, just like Nabal, who, upon hearing of his impending death, became as a stone. They are so engrossed by what is visible that they have no longing for that which cannot be seen with the eye but is eternal. Yet, everyone should know that the presence of God in heaven is far more desirable than His presence here on earth, even when our earthly condition is at its best.

Moving on to the next companion of faith, it compels us to often sigh and desire to depart from this world. It transforms us into strangers and pilgrims here, to the point where we have no more to do in this world than is absolutely necessary. This is quite a change, especially considering how deeply attached we once were to the world. We took great pleasure in thinking about what we have here and what we might acquire. We eagerly pursued the lusts of our hearts, the lust of our eyes, and reveled in our pride and glory over the things we loved most. We were like madmen, delighting in this world, even though we had no certainty of abiding until tomorrow, as if we were meant to stay forever. Yet, we must recognize that even when we rejoiced most in our earthly life, we were like bankrupts who appeared prosperous but were operating with the possessions of others. So, that in which we took pride was not our own; the goods and glory we cherished were someone else's, merely borrowed. During those times, we did not know God, nor did we dream of His daily mercies to His faithful ones. Since we were focused on earthly matters, we could not appreciate heavenly things; our minds were stuck on the earth.

However, since the Lord, through faith, has persuaded us of His favor and allowed us to experience the variety of holy and heavenly delights available to us in our Christian journey, we have determined to renounce our former ways. We now view everything here as transitory, vain, and quickly fading away, realizing that we, like all things, are moving closer to our end each day. We desire to have nothing holding us here other than our physical bodies, which should remind us to maintain a willingness to die, a grace that alone makes us fit to live as we should while we remain in this world. This grace accompanies faith in us after it has been effectively worked in us. This does not mean that we loathe the gift of life that God has given us, nor do we abandon our specific callings, which we are commanded to fulfill. We also do not condemn the moderate care of sustaining ourselves, providing for our well-being, and attending to our outward affairs while maintaining a heavenly perspective. However, we renounce the corruption in the world driven by lust and the profane abuse of worldly affairs and dealings that do not align with Christian practice or God's Word.

I mention these things for two reasons: First, in some respects, it is lawful and even holy to desire to live, especially to do good in the Church. We may and should say, like David, "I will live and not die to declare the works of the Lord." Similarly, we should consider our earthly affairs and our particular callings as opportunities to demonstrate the grace within us, such as patience, righteousness, hope, faith, and love. In doing so, our entire conduct can be well-ordered and consistent with our other holy duties. Therefore, in these respects, we may willingly and contentedly live as long as God wills it so that we can manifest the virtues He has bestowed upon us among men. God does not forbid these actions but rather commands them, with the charge that in carrying them out, we remain untainted and do not defile our consciences.

The second reason why I emphasize that we should not despise life and other lawful liberties is that some have falsely grounded and misunderstood this principle, causing confusion and distress among many weak individuals. Under the pretense of godliness, they have taught that when we become devout and religious, we should abandon the world. This means forsaking our earthly callings, activities, and even the company and fellowship of those engaged in such matters. They claim that by going into abbeys, friaries, hermitages, and cloisters, where we cannot witness or partake in worldly affairs, we can cultivate greater devotion and piety. While this opinion may seem plausible to the ignorant and unstable, it is palpably false to those with sound judgment. Unfortunately, it has deceived many, as the devil disguises himself as an angel of light, promoting such a lifestyle as the highest degree of holiness, even though it can be proven to be abominable.

Initially, some well-intentioned individuals withdrew from secular affairs and secluded themselves in remote places to avoid worldly distractions. However, cunning deceivers within the popish hierarchy later abused this practice for their nefarious ends. We should not be ignorant of the fact that when people act without proper authority, the longer they persist, the further they stray from the right path, just like a person who goes astray after leaving the correct route. This has been the cause of much wickedness within the Papacy, where the people were encouraged to embrace monastic life and superstitious devotion. This led to idleness, sexual immorality, sodomy, hypocrisy, and the merciless killing of the souls of many illegitimate infants. To stay on track, the second reason I clarified my position is to emphasize that contempt for the world does not entail despising life, abandoning worldly affairs, or forsaking our specific callings. It is possible to be godly and a believer while engaging in these aspects of life. I aimed to demonstrate that one can be a



contemner of the world while still participating in all these worldly matters. As a result, someone who is assured of salvation through faith can possess the grace to despise the world. This aspect is listed as the sixth property or inseparable companion of faith.

Moving forward, when we recognize that the Lord has enriched us in this manner after clinging to His promises (even though we were previously unlikely to receive such preferment), we begin to lament our past unkindness toward God. We regret the daily offerings of unkindness we presented to Him when we were unaware of His grace. We are even inclined to take revenge on ourselves for our prior actions, just as the woman in Luke wept over her unkindness to her Lord and Savior. She witnessed her unkindness after experiencing His sweet love, which prompted her to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair. We cannot forget that when He sought us, we fled from Him and refused to come, offering Him the bitterest fruit of our ingratitude despite His patience and long-suffering. It was the unspeakable mercy of God that we were not consumed when we refused to acknowledge Him and His ways, even though He sent His ministers daily to guide us. Consequently, we are now ashamed of our past deeds and deeply remorseful for the injuries we inflicted upon Him, considering how loving and gracious He has been to us despite our transgressions.

And therefore, sorrowing in this manner, we have been brought to take greater care in ordering our ways rightly and seeking to please Him. We have even become angry with ourselves and desire holy vengeance upon our own actions. In doing so, we declare our utter condemnation of our former ways. Who would have believed that the Lord would ever pardon them and lead us to repentance? But it has pleased Him to gain honor in this world by displaying His grace and kindness to us, even though we were unworthy. We serve as

examples, as the Apostle spoke of himself, to all future believers who will come to eternal life. This may persuade them that He will also extend His mercy to them. This is what prompted David to say, "Remember not, O Lord, the sins of my youth," and to ask, "Who should abide it if thou shouldest look straitly at what is done amiss?"

Lastly, as we see ourselves redeemed from such deep misery and wish the same good for our brethren, we declare to them how we have been redeemed whenever the opportunity arises, just as Philip and Andrew did privately, and Paul did publicly when called to do so. We are compelled to speak of the things we know, as the love of God constrains us, both to those who already know and believe, that we may rejoice together, and to those who do not yet know, especially those who are still in the state we were once in, so that they may be persuaded to escape it. It is our duty to strengthen others once we ourselves have been converted, and it is our privilege to save souls from death by turning them away from their evil ways. We do not share the view of those who think it uncivil or untimely to acquaint ignorant and wandering souls with this heavenly matter among strangers or their own neighbors or to build up the weak in the clear certainty of it. Instead, out of pity for their misery and their inability to help themselves, we believe it is right to benefit those with whom we interact by sharing what we have found to be the greatest happiness for ourselves.

Even though our natural inclinations may lead us in another direction, and our reluctance to engage in good deeds may counsel us to avoid the labor, we consider it a manifestation of our love and faith and a God-commanded duty to spread this knowledge. We are willing to forego our own pleasure, which we could find in idle conversation, in favor of seizing such valuable opportunities that may yield fruit. I believe that if we have found comfort through our

faith and experienced its benefits, using it more often should bring us even greater joy and hope, both for ourselves and others. The main obstacle may be that the people with whom we share such conversations are often dull, worldly, or light-hearted, making it seem like our efforts yield little result. However, we are patient with them, bearing with their ignorance, weaknesses, and waywardness, while waiting for God to transform their hearts. We do not expect immediate success or blessings but trust that God's timing and the results of our labors are in His hands.

In truth, this grace is rare in the world because people tend to prioritize themselves rather than the well-being of others. Many are preoccupied with worldly matters or seek pleasure elsewhere, leaving little room for this duty. If they engage with others, their conversations are often unkind, stubborn, and harsh, as two cannot walk together without being of one mind. When they interact more familiarly, their gatherings are filled with idle, light, vain, and worldly talk, leaving no room for this important task. We must remember that we owe our brethren the duty to benefit them with what we have found to be the greatest happiness for ourselves. Although our corrupt nature may lead us in a different direction, our willingness to fulfill this duty is a manifestation of our love and faith. We would rather prioritize their well-being over our own pleasure and seize the opportunities for fruitful discussions. I believe that edifying conversations not only benefit others but also enrich our own lives, strengthening our hearts and reinforcing our commitment to the right path.

These are the inseparable companions of unfeigned faith, as previously mentioned, although it should be acknowledged that wicked individuals may occasionally exhibit a semblance of these traits, particularly when they are in a good mood or under regular

teaching. Nevertheless, their unsavory nature becomes apparent at other times. To conclude, these are the graces that accompany those who believe and hold the assurance of happiness through God's promises, Christ's salvation, and the universal proclamation of the Gospel to all believers. By relying on these infallible foundations and cultivating these accompanying graces, anyone can examine themselves to see whether they belong to the Lord. Even if they do not immediately find this assurance, they will know how to regain it. For it is inconceivable that someone who has experienced these graces deeply can remain lost for long, except in times of temptation when they are greatly deceived and blinded. Eventually, they will rediscover the true path to happiness.

## **CHAP. 11.**

How weak faith is confirmed, and the comfort of it.

And now, a little further, I will add (as I promised) to support and satisfy those who have reached out to grasp God's promises and possess some measure of true faith, however small it may be. Those who have tasted the goodness of the Lord through even a small glimmer of true faith find it so sweet that they fear losing it again. Above all else, they desire to know how they can hold onto and keep it. This is indeed the most crucial question they can ask. I believe it is appropriate to address this question here because it concerns the doubts of those who have recently been born of God. The daily and continual growth in faith can be discussed more fittingly in another place when I address the new life and holy journey of those who

already belong to the Lord. Therefore, to answer this question, it is as follows: just as they obtained that small measure of faith by being led by God to consider it the most precious jewel in the world, and when convinced of its value, they willingly sought to believe by hearing, meditating, and praying, they should continue to do so.

If they wish to preserve and strengthen their faith from day to day until they are certain it is no longer in danger of being lost, they should daily consider it their greatest happiness in this life, their most precious treasure, and their finest possession. By doing this, their hearts will always be focused on it, and they will frequently fear losing it. They will regard it as the most essential thing to pay attention to, regardless of whatever else they may have in their lives worth pursuing. Just as a farmer is more concerned with his cattle and crops, which are his primary assets, than his poultry, which is smaller and less valuable, their earnestness will be directed toward their faith. Otherwise, every trivial distraction and personal desire will lead them astray and occupy their hearts. Moreover, their pressing businesses and weighty affairs, for which they believe religious exercises should be rightfully set aside, will take precedence. We are aware of the devil's schemes, how he fills people's minds with swarms of evil desires, noxious pleasures, and other such matters, especially those he knows people favor most, so they may not focus on better things. This applies especially to those on the path to understanding God's great kindness toward them, as he aims to divert them from that path. Therefore, they must not only find these evil things detestable but must also be sober and temperate even in their lawful liberties and dealings. They must prioritize one thing in everything they do: nourishing their faith and holding fast to their hope of eternal life and God's favor, knowing that the God who grants it never changes His mind or repents.

And to achieve this more effectively (which is often done too casually by many who have still experienced some sweetness in the promises), they should be directed to daily and frequently (although few will be persuaded to do so) lift up fervent prayers to God for this purpose. They should intentionally set themselves apart from all other distractions in the most convenient manner possible to call to mind the numerous and gracious promises of God. They should meditate deeply on these promises, contemplating their nature, truth, immutability, and permanence, as well as the loving and kind nature of God. This will serve to confirm their faith, gradually leading their hearts into a new pattern and habit. Through this, they may come to a more intimate understanding of God's nature, His intentions toward them, His loving disposition, their need to fear His anger less, and their ability to be free from doubt and wavering.

It should be well considered and frequently remembered that weak believers, aware of their many doubts, quickly let slip from their memory and hearts the grounds of their faith, which they once held and embraced through public preaching or similar means. They would let them slip unless they make an effort to review and remember them regularly. Furthermore, they should strengthen their feeble hearts and memories (as best they can) with some concise and clear proofs of their salvation and safety, which they have relied upon in the past and found comfort in. For instance, "Come to me, all you who are heavy laden, and I will ease you." From this, they should reason that if Christ calls those who are burdened and promises to relieve them, they can boldly come, believing His promise, embracing it, and enjoying it as their own. They should apply this to themselves as readily as Peter, Paul, or anyone else. This method should be repeated with other verses, as noted in the margin.

Some of these and similar verses should be frequently pondered and applied, as previously described, to maintain the secure state I have mentioned. It will enable them to approach God in prayer with confidence and boldness whenever they desire, without fear, and to carry out their actions without a slavish dread of Him when they are not praying. Without this practice, they will gradually waver and deviate either to the left or right, departing from the royal path, which the Prophet referred to when he said, "You uphold me in my integrity and set me before Your face continually." In other words, God will ensure that they remain unharmed, for they are constantly under His watchful gaze, like a child in its mother's eye, so they may not come to harm. In this royal path, they will not remain safe and secure unless, like those with poor eyesight who use spectacles, they help their spiritual eyesight by frequently looking into the mirror of God's word and promises. I do not suggest this because God frequently changes His mind (for He is always constant), but because we have weak memories, wandering affections, and deceitful hearts, all of which require such assistance and remedy. If anyone is troubled by this and asks what the weak should do, as they may not be capable of this, I respond: those who do not know this cannot do it. However, they should not be content in their current condition, even if they fear God. They should continue to follow what they do know. As for those who understand this teaching, they should not willingly neglect anything I have said, even if they are weak, for it is to their own benefit and advantage, which they would not wish to lose. I do not mean that they should neglect their specific calling, as both can and should coexist. Therefore, let God's children protect themselves from fear and doubt, even in the face of great danger, by frequently and seriously considering how gracious and good the Lord is to them, which will bring comfort to their hearts. As evidence of this, they should test their ability to believe that God will keep His covenant with them in smaller matters, as this will further confirm

their faith in greater matters. Though some degree of justifying faith is necessary before we can do anything pleasing to God, as stated in Hebrews 11:6, we must observe how God's word is fulfilled in other matters to strengthen this faith.

To strengthen their faith, they should also regularly and reverently hear the joyful message of reconciliation publicly preached to them. This is a primary purpose of such preaching, as the Apostle explains. Additionally, God has given them Sacraments to seal this truth in their hearts, which they have begun to taste. They should partake in these Sacraments, such as the Lord's Supper, with the command in mind: "Do this as often as you do it, in remembrance of me." Alongside these practices, they should diligently examine their sins, which they have identified, and daily keep them within bounds. They should do this by maintaining a humble and lowly view of themselves, filled with a sense of Christ's death, not making it a common or light matter. The sweetness of Christ's death cannot be truly appreciated unless one feels the bitterness and sharpness of their own sins.

Furthermore, their previous experiences should not be underestimated, as they can help establish and confirm them in this persuasion. They cannot deny that they have previously believed with joy and found relief for their heavy hearts through faith. Therefore, they should believe it is possible to experience this again. They should reassure themselves that their doubts are merely a sign of their own weakness, with no cause for doubt from God's side, for He is unchanging. They could enjoy God's favor and need not be in a worse state than this if they heed His guidance rather than following the false and erroneous belief that faith and other graces will persist in them, even if they are negligently cared for.



The fact that the Lord grants His beloved ones bold and free access to know His mind toward them and have a holy acquaintance with Him, which may be difficult to persuade those weak in faith of initially, shows that He does not regard them as servants but as friends. He is willing to share His secrets with them to the extent that it is beneficial for them to know. As Paul says, God's rich mercy is shown through abundant love. God considers them as the apple of His eye and holds them dear. He has removed the spirit of bondage from them so that they no longer need to fear Him but can serve Him without fear and rejoice in Him always. This is only possible if they have clear knowledge of His will and affection towards them, even more so than a son knows his father's mind or a wife her husband's. Therefore, even if those who have started to grasp eternal life through faith lose the comforting feeling of their faith due to Satan's tricks, coldness, falls, weaknesses, or similar challenges, they should not yield to doubt. Especially those who have genuinely experienced God's love shed into their hearts through Christ should consider it merely their own frailty and timidity, without cause. They were not better acquainted with God's will, but God loves those He has loved to the end.

Yet, this is not without the wise providence of God, who arranges all these weaknesses for their benefit, so that they may be humbled in themselves and rekindle their faith. It ultimately brings glory to God, who rescues those who, in their own perception, were on the brink of hell. The same applies to other hindrances they might encounter, such as losing the sense of their faith due to neglecting the means of preserving it, carelessness in their use, chasing after vanity or worldly desires, or feeling unsettled. They should not resort to saying, "We must accept going without it, and it is impossible to maintain it even after all our efforts." Instead, as they recognize their weakness, they should admit their shortcomings, acknowledging the

weakness of their sinful hearts, and then rectify what went wrong. They should regain their confidence as it was before and not let one thing disrupt the entire structure and well-ordered course of their lives. Just as someone with a toothache or leg wound does not neglect the overall health of their body, they should seek to address the specific issue so that the whole may be in good condition as it was before.

Since it greatly contributes to the nourishment of faith, especially in the morning, to season their hearts with meditations on God's promises of love and salvation, they should ensure that this duty is not altogether omitted even if necessary interruptions, weighty matters, or other unavoidable hindrances occur. It should not be regarded as a trivial matter that requires no attention. Instead, as soon as convenience allows, they should perform this duty if they wish to go through the day in safety and peace. Otherwise, in their weakness, Satan will give them little rest. By doing so, they will wield a strong weapon throughout the day to shield themselves from the violence and fury of the enemy.

However, this is not the place to delve into how the day should be spent; that will be discussed later. Here, it is only appropriate to briefly advise on how weak Christians can maintain their faith.

The sixth means to hold and confirm faith is by looking at the examples of others who, though initially weak, have grown strong in faith, such as Moses. Just as God has been with Moses and other faithful servants to strengthen them, He will also be with us until He completes the work He has started in us. This concludes the discussion of the means by which weak faith is assisted and strengthened.

## CHAP. 12.

The sweet fruit and benefit of the preserving and confirming of our faith.

Now, if anyone thinks that the consideration of these means and the daily diligence required for the preservation of faith is excessive, let them understand that the benefit it brings is exceedingly great. And if this explanation does not satisfy them, let them heed the words of the Apostle who says that our faith does not rely on human wisdom but on the power of God. In other words, faith is not something easily acquired as it may seem in us; it is a gift from God, and therefore, by seeking it as He has ordained and nurturing and maintaining it as He has prescribed, we can possess it. As I have mentioned before, if people do not make faith the foremost among all things, as it is in itself, and hold onto it as the first and most important, hearing and reading about it or talking about it will not profit them. Allow me to share the words of a pious Christian preacher, someone worthy of attention, with whom I have been present on many occasions when he spoke these words.

He said, "While I believed that I had faith, but did not firmly ground it, I occasionally thought about it and was glad to believe I had it, relying on previous experiences more than on a sure warrant. I did not exert myself to strengthen it through daily meditation on the promises any more than on other duties. However, when I recognized how beneficial and beautiful a grace faith is and how I must live by it, relying on it as I do on the air I breathe, I sought more certain grounding for it with greater care than before. I came to know that I possessed it through more and infallible arguments and

testimonies, and I never wearied of nurturing and increasing it, as I had learned how. For several years, I have diligently nourished and strengthened it every day, and I take pleasure in reflecting on the benefits it brings me, to the point that my gain and delight in it outweigh all pastimes. The labor I invest in it is far from being toilsome; it is my greatest solace. I do not think or feel myself ready to tackle the day's affairs until I have prepared by refreshing my soul, contemplating God's abundant love and favor toward me and resting upon it as my own. After doing so, I am cheerful and in a good state for the entire day. I am persuaded that I will continue to do this."

Now, to apply this Christian's words, since they are based on knowledge and align with the Scriptures, let us consider: What comfort or well-ordered state can be in our lives any day without this faith? When we lack the true and vivid perception of God's gracious kindness to begin the day, what can we expect for the day ahead? It may be filled with insipid frivolity that leads to deception or weighed down by worry and sorrow causing unease. If people were wise, they would realize they cannot go a single day without it, especially since God has granted them the liberty to enjoy such sweet communion with Him through this precious faith. They should also contemplate the uncertainty of life's end, like all other things they enjoy, and be prepared for it at any time. This is attainable if they maintain their confidence, which brings great reward. How can we lead our entire lives by faith in our various roles, believing that God will guide and bless us, as we will learn in the next Treatise, if we are not first well-versed and acquainted with this justifying faith?

But alas, we confirm the saying of our Savior, to our great shame it must be acknowledged, that the children of this world are often wiser in their own ways than we, the believers. They, if disappointed in one way, have twenty other ways to seek their desires. However, it is all

too evident that a significant portion, even among the better sort, those who have already tasted of this faith and assurance, do not consider it possible to maintain and increase it from day to day. Therefore, they do not make an effort to do so, content with occasional moments when it is revived in them through special preaching or circumstances.

By following this approach, they experience only a fraction of God's bounty and fatherly affection toward them. God doesn't intend to give them occasional tastes of His abundant love but desires them to be filled with it continually, thereby being safe throughout the day. If many of God's servants truly believed this, as they believe any other article of their faith, their heavy hearts would be filled with joy, and they would be lifted up with cheerfulness. Instead, they are burdened by fleeting mirth or unprofitable sorrow, lacking the boldness to rejoice in the Lord always because they do not always believe it is possible.

Due to their frequent lapses in faith, peace, and constancy, they become stumbling blocks for others who are on their spiritual journey. Many who witness this may think they are content with their own situation rather than following the example of these believers, unless they perceive some extraordinary beauty and excellence in their lives beyond what they see in themselves.

Moreover, when they do not maintain their faith for continuous periods, but only for special occasions, it brings unprofitability and sometimes dangerous straying into their lives. They also cause offenses that would not occur otherwise, leading to increased heaviness and prolonged periods of sorrow. Worst of all, they either do not dare or do not know how to rise again from their sorrow, making most of their lives a form of bondage, whereas through

believing, it should be a source of sweet liberty. Consequently, they do not enjoy many of the comforting fruits of faith that other Christians experience. In all of this, it must be acknowledged that God is not honored as He should be, and His praises do not resound in their hearts as they could if they nourished and lived by their faith and confidence from time to time.

While I would like to emphasize that much sweetness accompanies this faith, I do not intend to enumerate the privileges that come with it and a godly life in this place; that is addressed elsewhere.

I earnestly wish that this spirit of bondage, which often holds them in fear, were abandoned, and that the wavering and needless doubting, which consumes a great part of their lives (especially during significant afflictions or prolonged difficulties), were as far from them as the East is from the West. So they might perceive the abundant favor of God toward them, far greater than they have ever realized. They should recognize that they can enjoy it more frequently than they previously thought possible. For those who consider advice and direction on preserving faith to be excessive will remain without the benefits of it until they realize that those who did more than they were persuaded to do did not labor in vain.

As I mentioned earlier, let all those whom God has sealed with His Spirit for salvation, providing them with an earnest of it, be diligent in hearing and contemplating the promises daily. They should become familiar with the mind and purpose of God through this, even if worldly people consider them common and grow weary of hearing them. They should weigh these promises and apply them to their souls daily through private meditation. They can also learn from other faithful servants of God how they preserve their faith. Above all, they should be thoroughly convinced that no matter how

adversarial events may seem, the Lord seeks their good through them and does not delight in their sorrow and troubles. Otherwise, He could easily remove these troubles but sends them specifically for their benefit and good. As they grow rooted and established in their faith, just as a mustard seed grows into a stalk with branches and boughs, they will experience true peace, safety, and strength against their corruptions. The means by which their faith is preserved, however tiresome they may have seemed at times, will become easy and pleasant over time, granting them more reasons to be thankful in all things. This should be considered a rare and special blessing, especially when one considers how many thousands do not experience an hour of this comfort in a year or even in their entire lives.

This elucidates who belongs to the Lord, how the weak believer is upheld, how they differ from those who are not believers, what graces accompany faith, how faith should grow and become stable, and the ease and benefits it brings. It can also be deduced from this treatise that although faith is essentially the same, there are three degrees of it. The first, the weakest and smallest degree, lacks assurance yet bears inseparable fruits and infallible tokens of faith. The second degree includes moments of weak assurance, but it is often sought and missing, only to be regained by reflecting on one's condition and God's truth in His promises. The third and highest degree is stronger and more firmly established, typically accompanied by assurance, unless the believer quenches the Spirit in themselves or the Lord, for His glory and the believer's future stability, leaves them to themselves.

I have shared this information for the benefit of those with tender and weak faith who seek guidance. A more detailed examination of these helps can be found in the third part of this treatise, where the

means to preserve a whole heart, faith, and all godliness in the believer are outlined. Now, I believe it is appropriate to guide this believer towards applying their faith through a godly life and instruct them on the nature of that life, which is the subject of the second part of this book.

This concludes the first part of this Treatise.

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