A Practical Commentary upon the First Epistle of Peter

by Robert Leighton

1 Peter 1

1 Peter 2

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1Pe 1:1

Ver. 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

The grace of God in the heart of man is a tender plant in a strange unkindly soil; and therefore cannot well prosper and grow, without much care and pains, and that of a skilful hand, and one who has the art of cherishing it: for this reason God has given the constant ministry of the word to His Church, not only for the first work of conversion, but also for confirming and increasing His grace in the hearts of His children.

And though the extraordinary ministers of the Gospel, the Apostles, had principally the former for their charge—the converting of unbelievers, Jews and Gentiles, and so the planting of Churches, to be after kept, and watered by others (as the Apostle intimates, 1Co 3:6); yet did they not neglect the other work of strengthening the grace of God begun in the new converts of those times, both by revisiting them, and exhorting them in person, as they could, and by the supply of their writing to them when absent.

And the benefit of this extends, (not by accident, but by the purpose and good providence of God,) to the Church of God in all succeeding ages.

This excellent Epistle (full of Evangelical doctrine and Apostolic authority) is a brief, and yet very clear summary both of the consolations and instructions necessary for the encouragement and direction of a Christian on his journey to Heaven; elevating his thoughts and desires to that happiness, and strengthening him against all opposition along the way, both that of corruption within, and temptations and afflictions from without.

The heads of doctrine contained in it are many, but the main that are most insisted on, are these three, *faith, obedience*, and *patience;* to establish them in believing, to direct them in doing, and to comfort them in suffering. And because the first is the groundwork and support of the other two, this first chapter is much occupied with persuading them of the truth of that mystery which they had received and did believe, *viz.* their redemption and salvation by Christ Jesus; that inheritance of immortality bought by His blood for them, and the evidence and stability of their right and title to it.

And then he uses this belief, this assurance of the glory to come, as the great persuasive to the other two, both to holy obedience, and constant patience, since nothing can be too much either to forego or undergo, either to do or to suffer, for the attainment of that blessed state.

And as from the consideration of that object and matter of the hope of believers, he encourages to patience, and exhorts to holiness in this chapter in general; so in the following chapters, he expresses more particularly both the universal and special duties of Christians, both in doing and suffering; often setting before those to whom he wrote the matchless example of the Lord Jesus and the greatness of their engagement to follow Him.

In the first two verses we have the *inscription* and *salutation*, in the usual style of the Apostolic Epistles.

The *Inscription* has the author and the address,—from whom, and to whom. The author of this Epistle is designated by his name—Peter; and his calling—an Apostle.

We shall not insist upon his name, that it was imposed by Christ, or what is its signification: this the Evangelists teach us.[1]

By that which is spoken of him in various passages of the Gospel, he is very remarkable amongst the Apostles, both for his graces and his failings; eminent in zeal and courage, and yet stumbling oft in his forwardness, and once grossly falling; and these, by the providence of God being recorded in Scripture, give a check to the excess of Rome's conceit concerning this Apostle. Their extolling and exalting him above the rest, is not for his cause, much less to the honor of his Lord and Master Jesus Christ, for He is injured and dishonored by it; but it is in favor of themselves. As Alexander distinguished his two friends, that the one was a friend of Alexander, the other a friend of the king, the preferment which they give this Apostle is not in good-will to Peter, but in the desire of primacy. But whatever he was they would be much in pain to prove Rome's right to it by succession. And if ever it had any such right, we may confidently say they have forfeited it long ago, by departing from St. Peter's footsteps, and from his faith, and retaining too much those things wherein he was faulty; namely—

His unwillingness to hear of, and consent to, Christ's sufferings,—his *Master, spare yourself*, or *Be it far from you*,[2]—in those they are like him; for thus they would unburden and exempt the Church from the cross, from the real cross of afflictions, and instead of that, have nothing but painted, or carved, or gilded crosses; these they are content to embrace, and worship too, but cannot endure to hear of the other.—Instead of the cross of affliction, they make the crown or miter the badge of their Church, and will have it known by prosperity, and outward pomp; and so turn the Church militant into the Church triumphant, not considering that it is Babylon's voice, not the Church's, *I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.*[3]

Again, they are like him in his saying on the mount at Christ's transfiguration, when he knew not what he said, *It is good for us to be here*:[4] so they have little of the true glory of Christ, but the false glory of that monarchy on their seven hills: *It is good to be here*, they say.

Again, in their undue striking with the sword, not the enemies, as he, but the faithful friends and servants of Jesus Christ. But to proceed.

We see here Peter's office or title,—*an apostle;* not *chief bishop*. Some in their glossing have been so impudent as to add that besides the text; though in chap. 5 ver. 4, he gives that title to Christ alone, and to himself only *fellow elder;* and here, not *prince of the apostles,* but *an apostle,* restored and reestablished after his fall, by repentance, and by Christ Himself, after His own death and resurrection.[5] Thus we have in our Apostle a singular instance of human frailty on the one side, and of the sweetness of Divine grace on the other. Free and rich grace it is indeed, that forgives and swallows up multitudes of sins, of greatest sins; not only sins before conversion, as to St. Paul, but foul offenses committed after conversion, as to David, and to this Apostle: not only once raising them from the dead, but when they fall, stretching out the same hand, and raising them again, and restoring them to their station, and comforting them in it by His *free Spirit*, as David prays: not only to cleanse polluted clay, but to work it into vessels of honor; not only so, but of the most defiled shape to make the most refined vessels; not vessels of honor of the lowest sort, but for the highest and most honorable services; vessels to bear His own precious name to the nations; making the most unworthy and the most unfit, fit by His grace to be His messengers.

Of Jesus Christ.] Both as the beginning and end of his Apostleship, as Christ is called *Alpha* and *Omega;* chosen and called by Him, and called to this—to preach Him, and salvation wrought by Him.

Apostle of Jesus Christ.] Sent by Him, and the message no other than His Name, to make that known. And what this Apostleship was then, after some extraordinary way, befitting these first times of the Gospel, that the ministry of the word in ordinary is now; and therefore an employment of more difficulty and excellence than is usually conceived by many, not only of those who look upon it, but even of those who are exercised in it;—to be Ambassadors for the Greatest of Kings, and upon no mean employment, that great treaty of peace and reconciliation between Him and mankind.[6]

This epistle is directed to the *elect*, who are described here by their temporal and by their spiritual conditions. The first has very much dignity and comfort in it; but the other has neither, but rather the contrary of both; and therefore the Apostle, intending their comfort, mentions the one but in passing, to signify to whom particularly he sent his Epistle; but the other is that which he would have their thoughts dwell upon, and therefore he prosecutes it in his following discourse. And if we look to the order of the words [That is, the order in the original …], their temporal condition is but interjected; for it is said, *To the elect*, first, and then, *To the strangers scattered*, &c. and he would have this as it were drowned in the other—*According to the foreknowledge of God the Father*.

That those dispersed strangers who dwelt in the countries here named, were Jews, appears if we look to the foregoing Epistle, where the same word is used, and expressly appropriated to the Jews.[7] St. Peter, in Gal 2:8, is called *an apostle of the circumcision*, as exercising his Apostleship most towards them; and there is in some passages of this Epistle, somewhat which, though belonging to all Christians, yet has, in the strain and way of expression, a particular fitness to the believing Jews, as being particularly verified in them, which was spoken of their nation.[8]

Some argue from the name "strangers," that the Gentiles are here meant, which seems not to be; for proselyte Gentiles were indeed called strangers in Jerusalem, and by the Jews; but were not the Jews strangers in these places, *Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia,* and *Bithynia?*—Not strangers dwelling together in a prosperous, flourishing condition, as a well planted colony, but *strangers of the dispersion*, scattered to and fro. *Their dispersion* was partly, first by the Assyrian captivity, and after that by the Babylonish, and by the invasion of the Romans; and it might be in these very times increased by the believing Jews flying from the hatred and persecution raised against them at home.

The places here mentioned, through which they were dispersed, are all in Asia. So Asia here is Asia the *lesser;* where it is to be observed, that some of those who heard St. Peter are said to be of those regions. And if any of those then converted were amongst these dispersed, the comfort was no doubt the more grateful from the hand of the same Apostle by whom they were first converted; but this is only conjecture. Though Divine truths are to be received equally from every minister alike, yet it must be acknowledged, that there is something (we know not what to call it) of a more acceptable reception of those who at first were the means of bringing men to God, than of others; like the opinion some have of physicians whom they love.

The Apostle comforts these strangers of this dispersion, by the spiritual union which they obtained by effectual calling; and so calls off their eyes from their outward, dispersed, and despised condition, to look above that, as high as the spring of their happiness, the free love and election of God. Scattered in the countries, and yet gathered in God's election, chosen or picked out; strangers to men amongst whom they dwelt, but known and foreknown to God; removed from their own country, to which men have naturally an unalterable affection, but made heirs of a better (as follows, ver. 3, 4); and having within them the evidence both of eternal election and of that expected salvation, the *Spirit of holiness* (ver. 2). At the best, a Christian is but a stranger here, set him where you will, as our Apostle teaches after; and it is his privilege that he is so; and when he thinks not so, he forgets and disparages himself, and descends far below his quality, when he is much taken with anything in this place of his exile.

But this is the wisdom of a Christian, when he can solace himself against the meanness and any kind of discomfort of his outward condition, with the comfortable assurance of the love of God, that He has called him to holiness, given him some measure of it, and an endeavor after more; and by this may he conclude, that He has ordained him unto salvation. If either he is a stranger where he lives, or as a stranger deserted by his friends, and very nearly stripped of all outward comforts, yet may he rejoice in this, that the eternal, unchangeable love of God, which is from everlasting to everlasting, is sealed to his soul. And O! what will it avail a man to be surrounded with the favor of the world, to sit unmolested in his own home and possessions, and to have them very great and pleasant, to be well moneyed, and landed and befriended, and yet estranged and severed from God, not having any token of His special love?

To the elect.] The Apostle here designates all the Christians to whom he writes, by the condition of true believers, calling them *elect* and *sanctified*, &c.: and the Apostle St. Paul writes in the same style in his Epistles to the Churches. Not that all in these Churches were such indeed, but because they professed to be such, and by that their profession and calling as Christians, they were obliged to be such: and as many of them as were in any measure true to that, their calling and profession were really such. Besides, it would seem not unworthy of consideration, that in all probability there would be fewer false Christians, and the number of true believers would be usually greater, in the Churches in those primitive times, than now in the best reformed Churches; because there could not then be many of those who were from their infancy bred in the Christian faith, but the greatest part were such as, being of years of discretion, were, by the hearing of the Gospel, converted from Paganism and Judaism to the Christian religion first, and made a deliberate choice of it; to which there were at that time no great outward encouragements, and therefore the less danger of multitudes of hypocrites, which, as vermin in summer, breed most in the time of the Church's prosperity. Though no nation or kingdom had then universally received the faith, but rather hated and persecuted it, yet were there even then amongst them, as the writings of the Apostles testify, false brethren, and inordinate walkers, and men of corrupt minds, earthly-minded, and led with a spirit of envy and contention and vainglory.

Although the question that is raised concerning the necessary qualifications of all the members of a true visible Church can no way, as I conceive, be decided from the inscriptions of the Epistles; yet certainly they are useful to teach Christians and Christian Churches what they ought to be, and what their holy profession requires of them, and sharply to reprove the gross unlikeness and nonconformity that is in the most part of men to the description of Christians. As there are some that are too strict in their judgment concerning the being and nature of the visible Church, so certainly the greatest part of Churches are too loose in their practice.

From the dissimilarity between our Churches and those, we may make this use of reproof, that if an Apostolic Epistle were to be directed to us, it ought to be inscribed, "To the ignorant, profane, malicious," &c. As he, who at the hearing of the Gospel read, said, "Either this is not the Gospel, or we are not Christians," so, either these characters, given in the inscription of these Epistles, are not true characters, or we are not true Christians.

1Pe 1:2

Ver. 2. Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

In this verse we have their *condition* and the *causes* of it.—Their condition, sanctified and justified; the former expressed by *obedience*, the latter by *sprinkling of the blood of Christ*. The causes, 1. Eternal election. 2. The execution of that decree, their effectual calling, which, I conceive, is meant by election here, the selecting them out of the world, and joining them to the fellowship of the children of God.[9] The former, election, is particularly ascribed to God the Father, the latter to the Holy Spirit; and the *blood of Jesus Christ,* the Son of God, is here assigned as the cause of their justification; and so the whole Trinity concurring dignify them with this their spiritual and happy estate.

First, I shall discourse of these separately, and then of their connection.

I. Of the state itself, and 1. Of justification, though named last.

This *sprinkling* refers to the rite of the legal purification by the sprinkling of blood; and aptly so; for these rites of sprinkling and blood all pointed out this blood and this sprinkling, and exhibited this true ransom of souls, which was only shadowed by them.

The use and purpose of sprinkling were purification and expiation, because sin merited death, and the pollutions and stains of human nature were by sin. Such is the pollution, that it can in no way be washed off but by blood.[10] Neither is there any blood able to purge from sin except the most precious blood of Jesus Christ, which is called the *blood of God*.[11]

That the stain of sin can be washed off only by blood, intimates that it merits death; and that no blood but that of the Son of God can do it, intimates that this stain merits eternal death—and that would have been our portion, if the death of the eternal Lord of life had not freed us from it.

Filthiness needs sprinkling; guiltiness, such as deserves death, needs sprinkling of blood; and the death it deserves being everlasting death, the blood must be the blood of Christ, the eternal Lord of life, dying to free us from the sentence of death.

The soul, like the body, has its life, its health, its purity, and the opposite of these,—its death, diseases, deformities, and impurity, which belong to it as to their first subject, and to the body by participation.

The soul and body of all mankind are stained by the pollution of sin. The impure leprosy of the soul is not an outward spot, but wholly inward; so, as the bodily leprosy was purified by the sprinkling of blood, this is, too. Then, by reflecting, we see how all this expressed by the Apostle St. Peter is necessary for our justification. 1. Christ, the Mediator between God and man, is God and Man 1:2. A Mediator not only interceding, but also satisfying.[12] 3. This satisfaction does not reconcile us, unless it is applied; therefore there is not only mention of blood, but the sprinkling of it. The Spirit by faith sprinkles the soul, as with hyssop, by which the sprinkling was made: this is what the Prophet speaks about,[13] *So shall he sprinkle many nations;* and which the Apostle to the Hebrews prefers above all legal sprinklings (chap. 9:12-14), both as to its duration and as to the excellence of its effects.

Men are not easily convinced and persuaded of the deep stain of sin, and that no other laver can remove it but the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Some who have moral resolutions of amendment dislike at least gross sins, and try to avoid them—to them it is cleanness enough to reform in those things, but they haven't considered what becomes of the guiltiness they have already contracted, and how that shall be purged, how their natural pollution shall be taken away. Don't be deceived in this; it is not a passing sigh, or a light word, or a wish of "God forgive me;" no, nor the highest current of repentance, nor that which is the truest evidence of repentance, change—none of these purify us in the sight of God, and expiate His wrath; they are all imperfect and stained themselves, cannot stand and answer for themselves, much less be of value to compensate the former guilt of sin. The very tears of the purest repentance, unless sprinkled with this blood, are impure; all our washings without this are but washings of the blackamoor—it is labor in vain.[14] None are truly purified by the blood of Christ, who do not endeavor after purity of heart and conversation; yet it is the blood of Christ by which they are all made fair, and there is no spot in them. Here it is said, *elect to obedience;* but because that obedience is imperfect, there must be sprinkling of the blood too. There is nothing in religion further out of nature's reach, and out of its liking and belief, than the doctrine of redemption by a Savior, and a crucified Savior,—by Christ, and by His blood, first shed on the cross in His suffering, and then sprinkled on the soul by His Spirit. It is easier to make men aware of the necessity of repentance and amendment of life (though that is very difficult), than of this purging by the sprinkling of this precious blood. If we saw how necessary Christ is to us, we should esteem and love Him more.

It is not by the hearing of Christ, and of His blood in the doctrine of the Gospel; it is not by the sprinkling of water, even that water which is the sign of this blood, without the blood itself, and the sprinkling of it. Many are present where it is sprinkled, and yet have no portion in it. See to it that this blood is sprinkled on your souls, so that the destroying angel may pass by you. *There is a generation* (not some few, but a generation) deceived in this; they are their own deceivers, *pure in their own eyes*.[15] How earnestly does David pray, *Wash me, purge me with hyssop!* Though bathed in tears, that satisfies not—*Wash me*.[16] This is the honorable condition of the saints, that they are purified and consecrated to God by this sprinkling; yes, they have on long white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. There is mention indeed of great tribulation,[17] but there is a double comfort joined with it. 1. They come out of it; that tribulation has an end. And, 2. They pass from that to glory; for they have on the robe of candidates, long white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb, washed white in blood. As for this blood, it is nothing but purity and spotlessness, having no stain of sin, and besides, has the virtue to take away the stain of sin where it is sprinkled. *My well-beloved is white and ruddy*,[18] says the spouse; thus in His death, ruddy by bloodshed, white by innocence and purity of that blood.

Shall those, then, who are purged by this blood, return to live among the swine, and tumble with them in the puddle? What gross injury would this be to themselves, and to that blood by which they are cleansed! Those who are chosen to this sprinkling, are likewise chosen to *obedience*. This blood purifies the heart; yea, this blood purges our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.[19]

2. Of their sanctification. *Elect unto obedience*.] It is easily understood to whom. When obedience to God is expressed by the simple absolute name of obedience, it teaches us that to Him alone belong absolute and unlimited obedience, all obedience by all creatures. It is the shame and misery of man, that he has departed from this obedience, that we have become *sons of disobedience;* but grace, renewing the hearts of believers, changes their natures, and so their names, and makes them *children of obedience* (as afterwards in this chapter). As this obedience consists in the receiving Christ as our Redeemer, so also at the same time as our Lord or King; in an entire rendering up of the whole man to His obedience. This obedience, then, of the Only-begotten, Jesus Christ, might well be understood not as His *actively*, as Beza interprets it, but *objectively*, as 2Co 10:5. I think here it is chiefly understood to mean the obedience that the Apostle in the Epistle to the Romans calls the *obedience of faith*, by which the doctrine of Christ is received, and so Christ Himself, which unites the believing soul to Christ,—He sprinkles it with His blood, to the remission of sin,—and which is the root and spring of all future obedience in the Christian life.

By *obedience*, sanctification is intimated; it signifies both habitual and active obedience, renovation of heart, and conformity to the Divine will. The mind is illuminated by the Holy Spirit, to know and believe the Divine will; yea, this faith is the great and chief part of obedience.[20] The truth of the doctrine is first impressed on the mind—pleasant, loving obedience flows from it. From there all the affections, and the whole body, with its members, learn to willingly obey, and submit to God; while before they resisted Him, being under the standard of Satan.

This obedience, though imperfect, yet has a certain, if I may so say, imperfect perfection. It is universal in three kinds of ways,—1. In the subject. 2. In the object. 3. In the duration. The whole man is subjected to the whole law, and that constantly and perseveringly.

The first universality is the cause of the other. Because it is not in the tongue alone, or in the hand, but has its root in the heart, it does not wither as the grass or flower lying on the surface of the earth; but flourishes, because rooted. And it embraces the whole law because it arises from a reverence it has for the Lawgiver Himself. Reverence, I say, but tempered with love; hence, it considers no law nor command little, or of little importance, which is from God, because He is great and highly esteemed by the pious heart; no command hard, though contrary to the flesh, because all things are easy to love. There is the same authority in all, as St. James divinely argues; and this authority is the golden chain of all the commandments, which if broken in any link, all fall to pieces.

That this threefold perfection of obedience is not a picture drawn by fancy, is evident in David, Psa 119:1-176, where he subjects himself to the whole law: his feet, ver. 105; his mouth, ver. 13; his heart, ver. 11; the whole tenor of his life, ver. 24. He subjects himself to the whole law, ver. 6, and he professes his constancy therein, in verses 16 and 33: *Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end.*

II. We have the causes of the condition above described.

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.] The most exact knowledge of things is, to know them in their causes; it is then an excellent thing, and worthy of their endeavors who are most desirous of knowledge, to know the best things in their highest causes; and the happiest way of this knowledge is, to possess those things, and to know them in experience. To such the Apostle here speaks, and sets before them the excellence of their spiritual condition, and leads them to the causes of it.

Their state is, that they are sanctified and justified: the nearest cause of both these is, Jesus Christ. He is made to them both *righteousness* and *sanctification:* the sprinkling of His blood purifies them from guiltiness, and quickens them to obedience.

Now follows to consider the appropriating or applying cause, which is the Holy, and holy-making or sanctifying *Spirit*, the Author of their selection from the world, and effectual calling unto grace.

The source of all, the appointing or decreeing cause, is *God the Father:* for though they all work equally in all, yet, in order of working, we are taught thus to distinguish and particularly to ascribe the first work of eternal election to the first Person of the blessed Trinity.

In or through sanctification.] For to render it, *elect to the sanctification*, is strained: so then I conceive this election is their effectual calling, which is by the working of the Holy Spirit; as in 1Co 1:26-28, where *vocation* and *election* are used in the same sense: *You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, &c., but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise*. It is the first act of the decree of election; the beginning of its performance in those who are elected; and it is in itself a real separation of men from the profane and miserable condition of the world, and an appropriation and consecration of a man to God; and therefore, both regarding its relation to election, and regarding its own nature, it well bears that name.[21]

Sanctification in a narrower sense, as distinguished from justification, signifies the inherent holiness of a Christian, or his being inclined and enabled to perform the *obedience* mentioned in this verse; but it is here more large, and co-extends with the whole work of renovation; it is the severing or separating of men to God, by His Holy Spirit, drawing them unto Him; and so it includes justification, as here, and the first working of faith, by which the soul is justified, through its apprehending and applying the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Of the Spirit.] The word calls men externally, and by that external calling prevails with many to an external reception and profession of religion; but if it is left alone it goes no further. It is indeed the means of sanctification and effectual calling, as Joh 17:17, *Sanctify them through your truth;* but it does this when the Spirit, who speaks in the word, works in the heart, and causes it to hear and obey. The spirit or soul of a man is the chief and the first subject of this work, and it is but slight false work that doesn't begin there; but the *Spirit* here is rather to be taken for the Spirit of God, the efficient, than for the spirit of man, the subject of this sanctification. And therefore our Savior in that place prays to the Father, that He would sanctify His own by that truth; and this He does by the concurrence of His Spirit with that word of truth which is the life and vigor of it, and makes it prove *the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes*.[22] It is a fit means in itself, but it is a prevailing means only when the Spirit of God brings it into the heart. It is a sword, and *sharper than any two-edged sword*, fit to divide, yea, *even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit;*[23] but it does not do this without being in the Spirit's hand, and Him applying it to this cutting and dividing. The word calls, but the Spirit draws, not severed from that word, but working in it, and by it.

It is a very difficult work to draw a soul out of the hands and strong chains of Satan, and out of the pleasing entanglements of the world, and out of its own natural perverseness, to yield up itself to God,—to deny itself, and live to Him, and in so doing, to run against the mainstream, and the current of the ungodly world without, and corruption within.

The strongest rhetoric, the most moving and persuasive way of discourse, is all too weak; the tongue of men or angels cannot prevail with the soul to free itself, and shake off all that detains it. Although it be convinced of the truth of those things that are represented to it, yet still it can and will hold out against it, and say, *Non persuadebis etiamsi persuaseris*—You shall not persuade me, even though you convince me.

The hand of man is too weak to pluck any soul out of the crowd of the world, and to set it in amongst the select number of believers. Only the Father of spirits has absolute command of spirits, *viz.* the souls of men, to work on them as He pleases, and where He will. This powerful, this sanctifying Spirit knows no resistance; works sweetly, and yet strongly; it can come into the heart, whereas all other speakers are forced to stand without. That still voice within persuades more than all the loud crying without; as he who is within the house, though he speak low, is better heard and understood, than he who shouts outside the doors.

When the Lord Himself speaks by this His Spirit to a man, selecting and calling him out of the lost world, he can no more disobey than Abraham did, when the Lord spoke to him after an extraordinary manner, to depart from his own country and kindred: *Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him*.[24] There is a secret, but very powerful, virtue in a word, or look, or touch of this Spirit upon the soul, by which it is forced, not with a harsh, but a pleasing violence, and cannot choose but follow it, not unlike that of Elijah's mantle upon Elisha.[25] How easily did the disciples forsake their callings and their dwellings to follow Christ!

The Spirit of God draws a man out of the world by sanctified light sent into his mind, 1. Revealing to him how base and false the sweetness of sin is, which withholds men and amuses them, so that they return not; and how true and sad the bitterness is that will follow upon it; 2. Setting before his eyes the free and happy condition, *the glorious liberty of the children of God*,[26] the riches of their present enjoyment, and their far larger and assured hopes for hereafter; 3. Making the beauty of Jesus Christ visible to the soul; which immediately takes it so, that it cannot be stopped from coming to Him, though its most beloved friends, most beloved sins, lie in the way, and hang about it, and cry, Will you leave us so? It will tread upon all who come within the embraces of Jesus Christ, and say with St. Paul, *I was not disobedient unto*, or unpersuaded by, *the heavenly vision*.[27]

It is no wonder that the godly are by some called singular and precise: they are so, singular—a few selected ones picked out by God's own hand, for Himself: *Know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for himself*.[28] Therefore, says our Savior, *Because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*.[29] For the world lies in unholiness and wickedness—is buried in it; and as living men can have no pleasure among the dead, neither can these elected ones amongst the ungodly; they walk in the world as warily as a man or woman neatly appareled would do amongst a multitude that are all sullied and bemired.

Endeavor to have this sanctifying Spirit in yourselves; pray much for it; for His promise has passed to us, that He will give this Holy Spirit to those who ask it.[30] And shall we be such fools as to lack it, for lack of asking? When we find heavy fetters on our souls, and much weakness, yea averseness to follow the voice of God calling us to His obedience, then let us pray with the spouse, *Draw me.* She cannot go nor stir without that drawing; and yet, with it, not only goes, but runs. *We will run after you*.[31]

Think it not enough that you hear the word, and use the outward ordinances of God, and profess His name; for many are thus called, and yet but a few of them are chosen. There is but a small part of the world outwardly called, compared to the rest that is not so, and yet the number of the true elect is so small, that it gains the number of these that are called the name of *many*. Those who are in the visible Church, and partake of external vocation, are but like a large list of names (as is usual in civil elections), out of which a small number is chosen to the dignity of true Christians, and invested into their privilege. Some men in nomination to offices or employments, think it a worse disappointment and disgrace to have been in the list, and yet not chosen, than if their names had not been mentioned at all. Certainly, it is a greater unhappiness to have been *not far from the kingdom of God,*[32] (as our Savior speaks), and miss it, than still to have remained in the furthest distance; to have been at the mouth of the haven, the fair havens indeed, and yet driven back and shipwrecked. Your labor is most preposterous; you seek to ascertain and make sure things that cannot be made sure, and that which is both more worth and may be made surer than them all, you will not endeavor to make sure. Listen to the Apostle's advice, and at length set about this in earnest, *to make your calling and election sure*.[33] Make sure this election, as it is here (for that is the order), your effectual calling sure, and that will bring with it assurance of the other, the eternal election and love of God towards you, which follows to be considered.

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.] *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world*, says the Apostle James.[34] He sees all things from the beginning of time to the end of it, and beyond to all eternity, and from all eternity He foresaw them. But this foreknowledge here relates peculiarly to the elect. *Verba sensus in sacra scriptura denotant affectus*—Words of sensation in Scripture denote affections,—as the Rabbis remark. So in man, *If I regard iniquity*;[35] and in God, *For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, &c.*[36] And again, *You only have I known of all the families of the earth, &c.*[37] And in that speech of our Savior, relating it as the terrible doom of reprobates at the last day, *Depart, &c., I know you not, I never knew you*.[38] So St. Paul, *For that which I do I allow* [Gr. *know*] *not*.[39] And Beza observes that *ginosko* is by the Greeks sometimes taken for *decernere,* judicare—to determine, judge; thus some speak, to *cognosce* upon a business. So then this foreknowledge is none other than that eternal love of God, or decree of election, by which some are appointed unto life, and being foreknown or elected to that end, they are predestinated to the way to it. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*[40]

It is most vain to imagine a foresight of faith in men, and that God in the view of that faith, as the condition of election itself, has chosen them: for, 1. Nothing at all is *futurum*, or can have that imagined futurity, so to speak, but as it is, and because it is, decreed by God to be; and, therefore (as says the Apostle St. James in the passage before cited) *Known unto God are all his works,* because they are His works in time, and his purpose from eternity. 2. It is most absurd to give any reason of Divine will without Himself. 3. This easily solves all that difficulty which the Apostle speaks of; and yet he never thought of such a solution, but runs high for an answer, not to satisfy caviling reason, but to silence it, and stop its mouth: for thus the Apostle argues, *You will say then to me, Why does he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will? No but, O man, who are you who reply against God?*[41] Who can conceive where this should be, that any man should believe unless it has been given him of God? And if given him, then it was His purpose to give it him; and if so, then it is evident that He had a purpose to save him; and for that end He gives faith; not therefore purposes to save, because man shall believe. 4. This seems cross to these Scriptures, where they speak of the subordination, or rather coordination, of those two: as here, *foreknown* and *elect*, not because of obedience, or sprinkling, or any such thing, but to obedience and sprinkling, which is by faith. So God predestinated, not because He foresaw men would be conformed to Christ, but that they might be so: *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate*.[42] And the same order, *And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved*. Also, *And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed*.[43]

This foreknowledge, then, is His eternal and unchangeable love; and that thus He chooses some, and rejects others, is for that great purpose, to manifest and magnify His mercy and justice; but why He appointed this man for the one, and that man for the other, made Peter a vessel of this mercy, and Judas of wrath, this is even so, because it seemed good to Him. If this is harsh, yet is Apostolic doctrine. *Has not the potter* (says St. Paul) *power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?*[44] This deep we must admire, and always, in considering it, close with this: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*[45]

III. The connection of these we are now for our profit to take notice of; that effectual calling is inseparably tied to this eternal foreknowledge or election on the one side, and to salvation on the other. These two links of the chain are up in Heaven in God's own hand: but this middle one is let down to earth into the hearts of His children; and they, laying hold on it, have sure hold on the other two, for no power can sever them. If therefore they can read the characters of God's image in their own souls, those are the counterpart of the golden characters of His love, in which their names are written in the book of life. Their believing writes their names under the promises of the revealed book of life, the Scriptures; and so ascertains them, that the same names are in the secret book of life which God has by Himself from eternity. So that finding the stream of grace in their hearts, though they see not the fountain from where it flows, nor the ocean into which it returns, yet they know that it has its source, and shall return to that ocean which arises from their eternal election, and shall empty itself into that eternity of happiness and salvation.

Therefore much joy arises to the believer: this tie is indissoluble, as the agents are, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit: so are *election*, and *vocation*, and *sanctification*, and *justification*, and *glory*. And therefore, in all conditions, they may, from the sense of the working of the Spirit in them, look back to that election, and forward to that salvation; but those who remain unholy and disobedient, have as yet no evidence of this love; and therefore cannot, without vain presumption and self-delusion, judge thus of themselves, that they are within the peculiar love of God. But in this, *Let the righteous be glad, and let them shout for joy, all that are upright in heart*.[46]

It is one main point of happiness, that he who is happy knows and judges himself to be so: this being the peculiar good of a reasonable creature, it is to be enjoyed in a reasonable way; it is not as the dull resting of a stone, or any other natural body in its natural place; but the knowledge and consideration of it is the fruition of it, the very relishing and tasting its sweetness.

The perfect blessedness of the saints is awaiting them above; but even their present condition is truly happy, though incompletely, and but a small beginning of that which they expect. And their present happiness is so much the more, the clearer their knowledge and firmer their persuasion they have of it. It is one of the pleasant fruits of the godly, *to know the things that are freely given to us of God*.[47] Therefore the Apostle, to comfort his dispersed brethren, sets before them a description of that excellent spiritual condition to which they are called.

If election, effectual calling, and salvation, are inseparably linked together, then by any one of them a man may lay hold on all the rest, and may know that his hold is sure; and this is that way by which we may attain, and ought to seek that comfortable assurance of the love of God. Therefore *make your calling sure*, and by that your *election*;[48] for that being done, this follows of itself. We are not to pry immediately into the decree, but to read it in the performance. Though the mariner sees not the pole-star, yet the needle of the compass which points to it tells him which way he sails: thus the heart that is touched with the loadstone of Divine love, trembling with godly fear, and yet still looking towards God by fixed believing, points at the love of election, and tells the soul that its course is heavenward, towards the haven of eternal rest. He who loves may be sure he was loved first; and he who chooses God for his delight and portion may conclude confidently that God has chosen him to be one of those who shall enjoy Him and be happy in Him forever; because our love and electing of Him is but the return and repercussion of the beams of His love shining upon us.

Find but within you sanctification by the Spirit, and this argues, necessarily, both justification by the Son, and the election of God the Father. *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit*.[49] It is a most strange demonstration, *ab effectu reciproco*—from the reciprocal effect:—He called those He has elected; He elected those He called: Where this sanctifying Spirit is not, there can be no persuasion of this eternal love of God: those who are *children of disobedience* can conclude no otherwise of themselves, but that they are the *children of wrath*. Although, from present unsanctification, a man cannot infer that he is not elected—for the decree may, for part of a man's life, run, as it were, underground—yet this is sure, that that estate leads to death, and unless it be broken, will prove the black line of reprobation. A man has no portion amongst the children of God, nor can read one word of comfort in all the promises that belong to them while he remains unholy. Men may please themselves in profane scoffing at the Holy Spirit of grace, but let them nevertheless know this, that that Holy Spirit, whom they mock and despise, is that Spirit who seals men unto the *day of redemption*.[50]

If any pretend that they have the Spirit, and so turn away from the straight rule of the Holy Scriptures, they have a spirit indeed, but it is a fanatical spirit, the spirit of delusion and giddiness; but the Spirit of God that leads His children in the way of truth, and is for that purpose sent them from heaven to guide them there, squares their thoughts and ways to that rule: and that word whereof It is Author, which was inspired by It, sanctifies them to obedience. *He who says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*.[51]

Now this Spirit which sanctifies, and sanctifies to obedience, is within us the evidence of our election, and the earnest of our salvation. And whoever are not sanctified and led by this Spirit, the Apostle tells us what their condition is: *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*.[52]

Let us not delude ourselves: this is a truth, if there be any in religion—those who are not made saints in the state of grace, shall never be saints in glory.

The stones which are appointed for that glorious temple above, are hewn and polished, and prepared for it here; as the stones were wrought and prepared in the mountains for building the temple at Jerusalem. This is God's order.

He gives *grace* and *glory*.[53] Moralists can tell us that the way to the temple of honor is through the temple of virtue. Those who think they are bound for heaven in the ways of sin have either found a new way untrodden by all who have gone before, or will find themselves deceived in the end. We need not then that poor scheme for the pressing of holiness and obedience upon men, to represent it to them as the meriting cause of salvation. This is not at all to the purpose, considering that without it the necessity of holiness to salvation is pressing enough; for holiness is no less necessary to salvation, than if it were the meriting cause of it; it is as inseparably tied to it as the purpose of God. And in the order of performance, godliness is as certainly before salvation, as if salvation wholly and altogether depended upon it, and was in point of justice deserved by it. Seeing, then, there is no other way to happiness but by holiness, no assurance of the love of God without it, take the Apostle's advice; study it, seek it, follow earnestly after *holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*.[54]

Grace to you, and peace, be multiplied.] It has always been a civil custom amongst men, to season their conversation with good wishes one for another; this the Apostles use in their epistles in a spiritual Divine way suitable to their holy writings. It well becomes the messengers of *grace* and *peace* to wish both, and to make their salutation conform to the main scope and subject of their discourse. The Hebrew word of salutation we have here—*Peace*, and that which is the source both of this and all good things, in the other word of salutation used by the Greeks—*Grace*. All right rejoicing, and prosperity, and happiness, flow from this source, and from this alone, and are sought elsewhere in vain.

In general, this is the character of a Christian spirit, to have a heart filled with blessing, with this sweet good will and good wishing to all, especially to those who are their brothers in the same profession of religion. And this charity is a precious balm, diffusing itself in the wise and seasonable expressions of it, upon fitting occasions; and those expressions must be cordial and sincere, not like what you call court holy-water, in which there is nothing else but falsehood, or vanity at the best. This manifests men to be the sons of blessing, and of the ever-blessed God, the Father of all blessing, when in His name they bless one another: more than this, our Savior's rule goes higher, *bless those who curse you*, and urges it by that relation to God as their Father, that in this they may resemble Him: *that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven*.[55]

But in a more eminent way it is the duty of Pastors to bless their people, not only by their public and solemn benediction, but also by daily and importunate prayers for them in secret. And the great Father, who sees in secret, will reward them openly.[56]

They are to be ever both endeavoring and wishing their increase of knowledge and all spiritual grace, in which they have St. Paul as a frequent pattern. To those who are messengers of this grace, if they have experience of it, it is the oil of gladness that will dilate their heart, and make it large in love and spiritual desires for others, especially their own flocks.

Let us consider, 1. The matter of the Apostle's desire for them—*grace and peace.* 2. The measure of it,—that it may be *multiplied*.

1st. The matter of the Apostle's desire, *grace*. We need not make a noise with the many school distinctions of grace, and describe in what sense it is here to be taken: for no doubt it is all saving grace to those dispersed brethren, so that in the largest notion which it can have that way, we may safely here take it.

What are preventing grace, assisting grace, working and co-working grace (as we may admit these differences in a sound sense), but various names of the same effectual saving grace, in relation to our different state? as the same sea receives different names from the different parts of the shore it beats upon. First, it prevents and works; then it assists and prosecutes what it has wrought: *He works in us both to will and to do*.[57] But the whole sense of saving grace, I think, is comprehended in these two. 1. Grace in the fountain, that is, the peculiar love and favor of God. 2. Grace in the streams, the fruits of this love, (for it is not an empty, but a most rich and liberal love,) *viz*. all the graces and spiritual blessings of God bestowed upon those whom He had freely chosen. The love of God in itself can neither diminish nor increase, but it is multiplied, or abounds in the manifestation and effects of it. So then, to desire grace to be multiplied to them, is to wish to them the living spring of it—that love which cannot be exhausted, but is ever flowing forth, and instead of abating, makes each day richer than the one before.

And this is that which should be the top and sum of Christian desires,—to have, or want any other thing indifferently, but to be resolved and resolute in this, to seek a share in this grace, the free love of God, and the sure evidences of it within you, the fruit of holiness, and the graces of His Spirit. But most of us are taken up with other things. We will not be convinced how basely and foolishly we are busied, though in the best and most respected employments of the world, as long as we neglect our noblest trade of growing rich in grace, and the comfortable enjoyment of the love of God. Our Savior tells us that *one thing is needful,*[58] signifying that all other things are comparatively unnecessary, by-works, and mere impertinences: and yet in these we lavish out our short and uncertain time; we let the other stand by until we find leisure. Men who are altogether profane, do not think about it at all. Some others possibly deceive themselves thus, and say, When I have done with such a business in which I am engaged, then I will sit down seriously to this, and bestow more time and pains on these things, which are undeniably greater and better, and more worthy of it. But this is a neglect that is in danger to undo us. What if we reach not the end of that business, but end ourselves before it? Or if we do not, yet some other business may step in after that. Oh! then, say we, that must be dispatched also. Thus, by such delays, we may lose the present opportunity, and in the end, our own souls.

Oh! be persuaded it deserves your diligence, and that without delay, to seek something that may be constant enough to abide with you, and strong enough to uphold you in all conditions, and that is alone this free grace and love of God. While many say, *Who will show us any good?* set in with David in his choice, *Lord, lift up the light of your countenance* upon me, and this shall rejoice my heart more than the abundance of corn and wine.[59]

This is that light which can break into the darkest dungeons, from which all other lights and comforts are shut out; and without this all other enjoyments are, what the world would be without the sun—nothing but darkness. Happy are those who have this light of Divine favor and grace shining into their souls, for by it they shall be led to that city, where the sun and moon are unnecessary; for *the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*[60]

Godliness is profitable unto all things, says the Apostle, *having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*;[61] all other blessings are the attendants of grace, and follow upon it. This blessing which the Apostle here, as St. Paul also in his Epistles, joins with grace, was, with the Jews, of so large a sense, as to include all that they could desire; they wished peace, they meant all kind of good, all welfare and prosperity. And thus we may take it here for all kind of peace; yes, and for all other blessings; but especially that spiritual peace, which is the proper fruit of grace, and so intrinsically flows from it.

We may and ought to wish outward blessings for the Church of God, and particularly outward peace,—as one of the greatest, so one of the most valuable favors of God: thus prayed the Psalmist, *Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces*.[62]

But that Wisdom which does what He will, by what means He will, and works one contrariety out of another, brings light out of darkness, good out of evil,—can and does turn tears and troubles to the advantage of His Church; but certainly, in itself, peace is more suitable to its increase, and, if not abused, it proves so too. As in the Apostolic times, it is said, The Church had peace, and increased exceedingly.[63]

We ought also to wish for ecclesiastical peace to the Church, so that she may be free from dissensions and divisions. These readily arise, more or less, as we see in all times, and haunt religion, and the reformation of it, as a *malus genius*. St. Paul had this to say to his Corinthians, though he had given them this testimony, that they were enriched in all utterance and knowledge, and were lacking in no gift,[64] yet, presently after, 11:18; 3:3, I hear that there are divisions and contentions among you. *An enemy has done this*,[65] as our Savior speaks; and this enemy is no fool, for, by Divine permission, he works to his own end very wisely; for there is not one thing that does on all hands choke the seed of religion so much, as thorny debates and differences about itself. So, in succeeding ages, and at the breaking forth of the light in Germany, in Luther's time, multitudes of sects arose.

Profane men do not only stumble, but also fall and break their necks upon these divisions. "We see," think they, and some of them possibly say it out, "that they, who mind religion most, cannot agree upon it: our easiest way is, not to embroil ourselves, nor at all to be troubled with the business." Many are of Gallio's temper; they will care for none of those things.[66] Thus these offences prove a mischief to the profane world, as our Savior says, *Woe unto the world because of offences!*[67]

Then those on the erring side, who are taken with new opinions and fancies, are altogether taken up with them, their main thoughts are spent upon them; and thus the sap is drawn from that which should nourish and prosper in their hearts, sanctified useful knowledge, and saving grace. The other are as weeds, which divert the nourishment in gardens from the plants and flowers; and certainly these weeds, men's own conceits, cannot but grow more with them, when they give way to them, than solid religion does; for their hearts, as one said of the earth, are mother to those, and but step-mother to this.

It is also a loss, even to those who oppose errors and divisions, that they are forced to be busied in that way; for the wisest and godliest of them find (and such are sensible of it) that disputes in religion are no friends to that which is far sweeter in it, but hinder and abate it; *viz*. those pious and devout thoughts, that are both the more useful and truly delightful.

As peace is a choice blessing, so this is the choicest peace, and is the peculiar inseparable effect of this grace with which it is here jointly wished,—*Grace* and *Peace;* the flower of peace growing upon the root of grace. This spiritual peace has two things in it. 1. Reconciliation with God. 2. Tranquility of spirit. The quarrel, and matter of enmity, you know, between God and man, is, the rebellion, the sin of man; and he being naturally altogether sinful, there can proceed nothing from him, but what foments and increases the hostility. It is grace alone, the most free grace of God, that contrives, and offers, and makes the peace, else it had never been; we would have universally perished without it. Now in this is the wonder of Divine grace, that the Almighty God seeks agreement, and entreats for it, with sinful clay, which He could wholly destroy in a moment.

Jesus Christ, the Mediator and Purchaser of this peace, bought it with His blood, killed the enmity by His own death.[68] And therefore the tenor of it in the Gospel runs still in His name: *We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*;[69] and St. Paul expresses it in his salutations, which are the same with this, *Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*[70]

As the free love and grace of God appointed this means and way of our peace, and offered it,—so the same grace applies it, and makes it ours, and gives us faith to apprehend it.

And from our sense of this peace, or reconciliation with God, arises that which is our inward peace, a calm and quiet temper of mind. This peace which we have with God in Christ, is inviolable; but because the sense and persuasion of it may be interrupted, the soul that is truly at peace with God may for a time be disquieted in itself, through weakness of faith, or the strength of temptation, or the darkness of desertion; losing sight of that grace, that love and light of God's countenance, on which its tranquility and joy depend. *You hid your face,* said David, *and I was troubled.*[71] But when these eclipses are over, the soul is revived with new consolation, as the face of the earth is renewed and made to smile with the return of the sun in the spring; and this ought always to uphold Christians in the saddest times, *viz*. that the grace and love of God towards them depends not on their sense, nor upon anything in them, but is still in itself incapable of the smallest alteration.

It is natural for men to desire their own peace, the quietness and contentment of their minds: but most men miss the way to it; and therefore find it not; for there is no way to it, indeed, but this one by which few seek it, *viz*. reconciliation and peace with God. The persuasion of that alone makes the mind clear and serene, like your fairest summer days. *My peace give unto you, says Christ, not as the world gives.*[72] *Let not your heart be troubled.*[73] All the peace and favor of the world cannot calm a troubled heart; but where this peace is which Christ gives, all the trouble and disquiet of the world cannot disturb it. *When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble? when he hides his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only.*[74] All outward distress to a mind thus at peace, is but as the rattling of the hail upon the rooftop, to him who sits within the house at a sumptuous feast. A good conscience is called so, and with an advantage that no other feast can have, nor could men endure it. A few hours of feasting will weary the most professed epicure; but a conscience thus at peace is a *continual feast*, with continual unwearied delight. What makes the world take up such a prejudice against religion as a sour unpleasant thing? They see the afflictions and griefs of Christians, but they do not see their joys, the inward pleasure of mind that they can possess in a very hard estate. Have you not tried other ways enough? Has not he tried them who had more ability and skill for it than you, and found them not only *vanity* but *vexation of spirit?*[75] If you have any belief of holy truth, put but this once upon the trial, seek peace in the way of grace. This inward peace is too precious a liquor to be poured into a filthy vessel. A holy heart, that gladly entertains grace, shall find that it and peace cannot dwell asunder.

An ungodly man may sleep to death in the lethargy of carnal presumption and impenitence; but a true, lively, solid peace, he cannot have. *There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked.*[76] And if He says there is none, speak peace who will, if all the world with one voice should speak, it shall prove none.

2ndly. Consider the *measure* of the Apostle's desire for his scattered brethren, that this *Grace* and *Peace* may be multiplied. This the Apostle wishes for them, knowing the imperfection of the graces and peace of the saints while they are here below; and this they themselves, under a sense of that imperfection, ardently desire. Those who have tasted the sweetness of this grace and peace, call incessantly for more. This is a disease in earthly desires, and a disease incurable by all the things desired; there is no satisfaction attainable by them; but this avarice of spiritual things is a virtue, and by our Savior is called Blessedness, because it tends to fullness and satisfaction. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*[77]

1Pe 1:3-4

Ver. 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Ver. 4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away.

It is a cold lifeless thing to speak of spiritual things upon mere report: but those who speak of them as their own, as having share and interest in them, and some experience of their sweetness, their discourse of them is enlivened with firm belief, and ardent affection; they cannot mention them, but their hearts are straight taken with such gladness, as they are forced to vent in praises. Thus our Apostle here, and St. Paul, Eph 1:1-23 and often elsewhere, when they considered these things with which they were about to comfort the godly to whom they wrote, they were suddenly elevated with the joy of them, and broke forth into thanksgiving; so teaching us, by their example, what real joy there is in the consolations of the Gospel, and what praise is due from all the saints to the God of those consolations. This is such an inheritance, that the very thoughts and hopes of it are able to sweeten the greatest griefs and afflictions. What then shall the possession of it be, where there shall be no rupture, nor the least drop of any grief at all? The main subject of these verses is that, which is the main comfort that supports the spirits of the godly in all conditions.

1. Their *after inheritance*, as in the 4th verse. 2ndly, Their *present title* to it, and assured hope of it, ver. 3. 3rdly, The *immediate cause* of both assigned, *viz*. *Jesus Christ*. 4thly, All this derived from the *free mercy of God*, as the first and highest cause, and returned to His praise and glory, as the last and highest end of it.

For the *first:* The *inheritance*. [But because the 4th verse, which describes it, is linked with the subsequent, we will not go so far off to return back again, but first speak to this 3rd verse, and in it,]

Consider 1. Their *Title* to this *inheritance*, *Begotten again*. 2. Their *Assurance* of it, *viz*. a *holy* or *lively hope*.

The *title* which the saints have to their rich inheritance is of the most valid and most unquestionable kind, *viz.* by birth. Not by their first natural birth, by that we are all born to an inheritance indeed, but we find what it is, Children of wrath,[78] heirs apparent of eternal flames. It is an everlasting inheritance too, but so much the more fearful, being of everlasting misery, or, so to speak, of immortal death: and we are made sure to it; those who remain in that condition cannot lose their right, although they gladly would escape it; they shall be forced to enter possession. But it is by a new and supernatural birth that men are both freed from their engagement to that woeful inheritance, and invested into the rights of this other here mentioned, as full of happiness as the former is miserable: therefore are they said here to be gotten again to that lively hope. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has begotten us again. And thus are the regenerate the children of an immortal Father, and, as such, entitled to an inheritance of immortality: *If children, then heirs; heirs of God;* and this sonship is by adoption in Christ; therefore it is added, *Joint-heirs with Christ*.[79] We, adopted; and He, the only begotten Son of God, by an eternal, ineffable generation.

And yet, this our adoption is not a mere outward designation, as adoption is amongst men; but accompanied with a real change in those who are adopted, a new nature and spirit being infused into them, because of which, as they are adopted to this their inheritance in Christ, they are likewise begotten of God, and born again to it, by the supernatural work of regeneration. They are like their heavenly Father; they have His image renewed on their souls, and their Father's Spirit: they have it, and are actuated and led by it. This is that great mystery of the kingdom of God which puzzled Nicodemus; it was darkness to him at first, until he was instructed in that night, under the cover of which he came to Christ.

Nature cannot conceive of any generation or birth, but that which is within its own compass: only those who are partakers of this spiritual birth understand what it means—to others it is a riddle, an unsavory, unpleasant subject.

It is sometimes ascribed to the subordinate means—to Baptism, called therefore the *washing of regeneration*:[80] to the word of God,[81] that immortal seed, by which we are born again; to the ministers of this word, and the seals of it. *For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you have not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel*.[82] But all these means have their vigor and efficacy in this great work from the Father of spirits, who is their Father in their first creation and infusion, and in this their regeneration, which is a new and second creation: *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature*.[83]

Divines have reason to infer from the nature of conversion thus expressed, that man does not bring anything to this work himself. It is true he has a will, as his natural faculty; but that this will embraces the offer of grace, and turns to Him who offers it, is from renewing grace, which sweetly and yet strongly, strongly and yet sweetly, inclines it.

1. Nature cannot raise itself to this, any more than a man can give natural being to himself. 2. It is not a superficial change; it is a new life and being. A moral man in his changes and reformations of himself, is still the same man. Though he reforms so far that men, in their ordinary phrase, shall call him quite another man, yet in truth, till he is born again, there is no new nature in him. The sluggard turns on his bed as the door on the hinges, says Solomon.[84] Thus the natural man turns from one custom and posture to another, but never turns off. But the Christian, by virtue of this new birth, can say indeed, *Ego non sum ego*—I am not the same man I was.

You who are nobles, aspire to this honorable condition; add this nobleness to the other, for it far surpasses it; make it the crown of all your honors and advantages. And you who are of mean birth, or if you have any crack or stain in your birth, the only way to make up and repair all, and truly to ennoble you, is this—to be the sons of a King, yes, of the King of kings, and *this honor have all his saints*.[85] To as many as received Him, He gave this privilege to be the sons of God.[86]

Unto a lively hope.] *Now are we the sons of God*, says the Apostle,[87] *and it does not yet appear what we shall be.* These sons are heirs, but all this lifetime is their under-age; yet, even now, being partakers of this new birth and sonship, they have a right to it, and in the assurance of that right, this *living hope;* as an heir, when he is capable of those thoughts, has not only right of inheritance, but may rejoice in the hope he has of it, and please himself in thinking about it. But hope is said to be only of an uncertain good: true, in the world's phrase, it is so; for *their* hope is conversant in uncertain things, or in things that may be certain, after an uncertain manner: all their worldly hopes are tottering, built upon sand, and their hopes of Heaven are but blind and groundless conjectures; but the hope of the sons of the Living God is a living hope. That which Alexander said when he dealt liberally about him, that he left hope to himself, the children of God may more wisely and happily say, when they leave the hot pursuit of the world to others, and despise it; their portion is hope. The thread of Alexander's life was cut off in the midst of his victories, and so all his hopes vanished; but their hope cannot die nor disappoint them.

But then it is said to be *lively*, not only objectively, but effectively; enlivening and comforting the children of God in all distresses, enabling them to encounter and surmount all difficulties in the way. And then it is formally so; it cannot fail—dies not before accomplishment. Worldly hopes often mock men, and so cause them to be ashamed; and men take it as a great blot, and are most of all ashamed of those things that reveal weakness of judgment in them. Now worldly hopes do thus—they put the fool upon a man: when he has judged himself sure, and laid so much weight and expectation on them, then they break and foil him: they are not living, but lying hopes, and dying hopes; they die often before us, and we live to bury them, and see our own folly and unhappiness in trusting to them: but at the utmost, they die with us when we die, and can accompany us no further. But this hope answers expectation to the full, and much beyond it, and deceives no way but in that happy way of far exceeding it.

A *living hope*—living in death itself! The world dares say no more for its device, than *Dum spiro spero*—While I breathe I hope—but the children of God can add by virtue of this living hope, *Dum expiro spero*—While I breathe my last, I hope. It is a fearful thing when a man and all his hopes die together. Thus says Solomon of the wicked: When he dies, then die his hopes;[88] (many of them *before*, but at the utmost *then*, all of them;) but the *righteous has hope in his death*.[89] Death, which cuts the sinews of all other hopes, and turns men out of all other inheritances, alone fulfils this hope, and ends it in fruition; as a messenger sent to bring the children of God home to the possession of their inheritance.

By the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.] This refers both to *begotten again* by His resurrection, and having this *living hope* by His resurrection: and well suits both, it being the proper cause of both in this order. First, then, of the birth; next, of the hope.

The image of God is renewed in us by our union with Him who is *the express image of his Father's person*.[90] Therefore this new birth in the conception is expressed by the forming of Christ in the soul;[91] and His resurrection particularly is assigned as the cause of our new life. This new birth is called our resurrection, and that in conformity to Christ, yes, by the virtue and influence of His. His resurrection is called a *birth*, He the *first begotten of the dead*,[92] and that prophecy, You are my Son; *this day have I begotten you*,[93] is applied to His resurrection as fulfilled in it. *God has fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he has raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, You are my Son, this day have I begotten you*.[94] Not only is it the exemplar, but the efficient cause of our new birth. Thus, in the sixth chapter of Romans, at large, and often elsewhere.

And thus likewise it is the cause of our *living hope*,—that which indeed inspires and maintains life in it. Because He has conquered death, and has risen again, and that is implied which follows, He is set down at the right hand of God,[95] has entered into possession of that inheritance;—this gives us a living hope, that, according to His own request, where He is, there we may be also.[96] Thus this hope is strongly underpinned, on the one side, by the resurrection of Christ; on the other by the abundant mercy of God the Father. Our hope does not depend on our own strength or wisdom nor on anything in us; (for if it did, it would be short-lived, would die, and die quickly;) but on His resurrection who can die no more: *for in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he lives, he lives unto God!*[97]—This makes this hope not to imply, in the notion of it, uncertainty, as worldly hopes do; but it is a firm, stable, inviolable hope, an anchor fixed within the veil.[98]

According to his abundant mercy.] Mercy is the spring of all this; yes, great mercy, and manifold mercy; "for (as St. Bernard says) great sins and great miseries need great mercy, and many sins and miseries need many mercies." And is not this great mercy, to make of Satan's slaves sons of the Most High? Well may the Apostle say, *Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!*[99]—The world knows us not because it knew not Him. Those who have not seen the father of a child cannot know that it resembles him. Now the world knows not God, and therefore discerns not His image in His children so as to esteem them for it. But whatever be their opinion, this we must say ourselves, Behold what love! to take firebrands of hell, and to appoint them to be one day brighter than the sun in the firmament; to raise the poor out of the dunghill, and set them with princes.[100]

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.] Here, lastly, we see it stirs up the Apostle to praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the style of the Gospel; as formerly, under the Law, it was *The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,*[101] and *The God that brought you up out of the land of Egypt*,[102] &c. This now is the order of the government of grace, that it holds first with Christ our Head, and in Him with us. So He says, *I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God;*[103] which, as St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in his Catechism, observes, shows us not only our communion with Him,—that might have been expressed thus, *I go to my God and Father*,—but the order of the covenant, first my Father and my God, and then yours. Thus ought we, in our consideration of the mercies of God, still to take in Christ, for in Him they are conveyed to us: thus, *With all spiritual blessings in Christ*.[104]

Blessed.] He blesses us really; *benefaciendo* benedicit—He blesses by doing us good. We bless Him by acknowledging His goodness. And this we ought to do at all times, *I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth*.[105] All this is far below Him and His mercies. What are our lame praises compared to His love? Nothing, and less than nothing: but love will stammer, rather than be dumb. Those who are amongst His children *begotten again*, have, in the resurrection of Christ, a lively hope of glory: as it is, *Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*.[106] This leads them to observe and admire that rich mercy whence it flows; and this consideration awakes them, and constrains them to break forth into praises.

To an inheritance incorruptible.] *As he who takes away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon niter, so is he who sings songs to a heavy heart*.[107] Worldly mirth is so far from curing spiritual grief, that even worldly grief, where it is great and takes deep root, is not allayed but increased by it. The more a man who is full of inward heaviness is surrounded by mirth, the more it exasperates and enrages his grief; like ineffective weak medicine, which removes not the disease, but stirs it and makes it more agitated: but spiritual joy is seasonable for all conditions; in prosperity, it is pertinent, to crown and sanctify all other enjoyments, with this which so far surpasses them; and in distress, it is the only *Nepenthe*, the cordial of fainting spirits: so, *He has put joy into my heart*.[108] This mirth makes way for itself, which other mirth cannot do. These songs are sweetest in the night of distress. Therefore the Apostle, writing to his scattered afflicted brethren, begins his Epistle with this song of praise, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The matter of this joy is, the joyful remembrance of the happiness laid up for them, under the name of *inheritance*. Now this inheritance is described by the singular qualities of it. They contain, 1. The excellence of its nature; 2. The certainty of its attainment. The former in these three, *Incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away;* the latter, in the last words of this verse, and in the verse following: *Reserved in heaven for you,* &c.

God is bountiful to all—gives to all men all that they have, health, riches, honor, strength, beauty, and wit: but those things He scatters (as it were) with an indifferent hand. Upon others He looks, as well as upon His beloved children; but the inheritance is peculiarly *theirs*. Inheritance is convertible with sonship; Abraham gave gifts to Keturah's sons, and dismissed them, but the inheritance was for the son of the promise [Gen 25:5-6]. When we see a man rising in preferment or estate, or admired for excellent gifts and endowments of mind, we think there is a happy man; but we consider not that none of all those things are matter of inheritance; within a while he is to be turned out of all, and if he has not something beyond all those to look to, he is but a miserable man, and so much the more miserable, that once he seemed and was reputed happy.

There is a certain time when heirs come to possess: thus it is with this inheritance too. There is mention made by the Apostle of a *perfect man,—unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*.[109] And though the inheritance is rich and honorable, yet the heir, being young, is held under discipline, and is more strictly dealt with, possibly, than the servants,—sharply corrected for that, which is overlooked in them; but still, even then, in regard of that which he is born to, his condition is much better than theirs, and all the correction he suffers prejudices him not, but prepares him for inheriting. The love of our heavenly Father is beyond the love of mothers in tenderness, and yet beyond the love of fathers, who are usually said to love more wisely, in point of wisdom. He will not undo His children, His heirs, with too much indulgence. It is one of His heavy judgments upon the foolish children of disobedience, that ease shall slay them, and their prosperity shall prove their destruction.[110]

While the children of God are childish and weak in faith, they are like some great heirs before they come to years of understanding: they consider not their inheritance, and what they are to come to, have not their spirits elevated to thoughts worthy of their estate, and their behavior conformed to it; but as they grow up in years, they come, by little and little, to be aware of those things, and the nearer they come to possession, the more apprehensive they are of their quality, and of what does answerably become them to do. And this is the duty of those who are indeed heirs of glory;—to grow in the understanding and consideration of that which is prepared for them, and to fit themselves, as they are able, to those great hopes. This is what the Apostle St. Paul prays for, on behalf of his Ephesians, *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints*.[111] This would make them holy and heavenly, to have their conversation in heaven, from where they look for a Savior.[112] That we may, then, the better know something of the dignity and riches of this inheritance, let us consider the description which is here given us of it. And, first, it is—

Incorruptible.] Although this seems to be much the same with the third quality, *That fades not away*, (which is a borrowed expression for the illustrating of its incorruptibleness,) yet, I think that there is some difference, and that in these three qualities there is a gradation. Thus it is called *incorruptible;* that is, it perishes not, cannot come to nothing, is an estate that cannot be spent: but though it were abiding, yet it might be such as that the continuance of it were not very desirable; it would be but a misery at best, to continue always in this life. *Plotinus* thanked God that his soul was not tied to an immortal body. Then, *undefiled;* it is not stained with the least spot: this signifies the purity and perfection of it, as that the perpetuity of it. It does not only abide, and is pure, but both together; and it abides always in its integrity. And lastly, it *fades not away;* it does not fade nor wither at all, is not sometimes more, sometimes less pleasant, but ever the same, still like itself; and that is the immutability of it.

As it is incorruptible, it carries away the palm from all earthly possessions and inheritances; for all those epithets are intended to signify its opposition to the things of this world, and to show how far it excels them all; and thus comparatively we are to consider it. For as divines say of the knowledge of God which we have here, that the negative notion makes up a great part of it—we know rather what He is not, than what He is, infinite, incomprehensible, immutable, &c.; so it is of this happiness, this inheritance: and indeed it is none other than God. We cannot tell you what it is, but we can say so far what it is not, as declares it is unspeakably above all the most excellent things of the inferior world and this present life. It is by privatives, by removing imperfections from it, that we describe it, and we can go no further,—*Incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away*.

All things that we see, being compounded, may be dissolved again. The very visible heavens, which are the purest piece of the material world, notwithstanding the pains the philosopher takes to exempt them, the Scriptures teach us that they are *corruptible, They shall perish, but you shall endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shall you change them, and they shall be changed*.[113] And from thence the Apostle to the Hebrews,[114] and our Apostle, in his other Epistle,[115] use the same expression. But it is unnecessary to fetch too great a compass, to evince the corruptibility of all inheritances. Besides what they are in themselves, it is a shorter way to prove them corruptible in relation to us and our possessing them, by our own corruptibility and corruption, or perishing out of this life in which we enjoy them. We are here *inter peritura perituri*—perishing among perishing things; the things are passing which we enjoy, and we are passing who enjoy them. An earthly inheritance is so called in regard of succession; but to everyone it is at the most but for the term of life. As one of the kings of Spain replied to one of his courtiers, who, thinking to please his master, wished that kings were immortal; If that had been, said he, I should never have been king. When death comes, that removes a man out of all his possessions to give place to another; therefore are these inheritances decaying and dying in relation to us, because we decay and die; and when a man dies, his inheritances and honors, and all things here, are at an end, in respect of him; yea, we may say the world ends to him.

Thus Solomon reasons, that a man's happiness cannot be upon this earth; because it must be some durable, abiding thing that must make him happy—abiding, to wit, in his enjoyment. Now, although the earth abides, yet, because man abides not on the earth to possess it, but one age drives out another, one generation passes, and another comes, *velut unda impellitur unda*—as wave is driven on by wave, therefore, his rest and his happiness cannot be here.

Undefiled.] All possessions here are defiled and stained with many other defects and failings—still somewhat wanting, some damp on them or crack in them; fair houses, but sad cares flying about the gilded and ceiled roofs; stately and soft beds, and a full table, but a sickly body and queasy stomach. As the fairest face has some mole or wart in it, so all possessions are stained with sin, either in acquiring or in using them, and therefore they are called, *mammon of unrighteousness*.[116] Iniquity is so involved in the notion of riches, that it can very hardly be separated from them. St. Jerome says, *Verum mihi videtur illud, dives aut iniquus est, aut iniqui haeres*—To me it appears, that he who is rich is either himself an unjust man, or the heir of one. Foul hands pollute all they touch; it is our sin that defiles what we possess, it is sin that burdens the whole creation, and presses groans out of the very frame of the world. *For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now*.[117] This our leprosy defiles our houses, the very walls and floors, our meat and drink, and all we touch; polluted when alone, and polluted in society; our meetings and conversations together being for the greatest part nothing but a commerce and interchange of sin and vanity.

We breathe up and down in an infected air, and are very receptive of the infection by our own corruption within us. We readily turn the things we possess here to occasions and instruments of sin, and think there is no liberty nor delight in their use without abusing them. How few are those who can carry, as they say, a full cup even; who can have digestion strong enough for the right use of great places and estates; who can bear preferment without pride, and riches without covetousness, and ease without wantonness!

Then, as these earthly inheritances are stained with sin in their use, so what grief and strife, and contentions about obtaining or retaining them! Does not matter of possession, this same *meum* and *tuum*—mine and yours—divide many times the affections of those who are knit together in nature, or other strict ties, and prove the very apple of strife between nearest friends?

If we trace great estates to their first original, how few will be found that owe not their beginning either to fraud, or rapine, or oppression! and the greatest empires and kingdoms in the world have had their foundations laid in blood. Are not these defiled inheritances?

That withers not.] A borrowed speech, alluding to the decaying of plants and flowers, which bud and flourish at a certain time of the year, and then fade and wither, and in winter are as if they were dead.

And this is the third disadvantage of possessions and all things worldly, that they abide not in one estate, but are in a more uncertain and irregular inconstancy than either the flowers and plants of the field, or the moon, from which they are called *sublunary;* like Nebuchadnezzar's image, degenerating by degrees into baser metals, and, in the end, into a mixture of iron and clay.

The excellence, then, of this inheritance is, that it is free from all those evils. It falls not under the stroke of time, comes not within the compass of its scythe, which has so large a compass, and cuts down all other things.

There is nothing in it weighing it towards corruption. It is immortal, everlasting; for it is the fruition of the immortal, everlasting God, by immortal souls; and the body rejoined with it shall likewise be immortal, having *put on incorruption*, as the Apostle speaks.[118]

It fades not away.] No spot of sin nor sorrow there; all pollution wiped away, and all tears with it; no envy nor strife; not as here among men, one supplanting another, one pleading and fighting against another, dividing this point of earth with fire and sword;—no, this inheritance is not the less by division, by being parted amongst so many brethren, everyone has it all, each his crown, and all agreeing in casting them down before His throne, from whom they have received them, and in the harmony of His praises.

This inheritance is often called a kingdom, and a crown of glory. This word may allude to those garlands of the ancients; and this is its property, that the flowers in it are all *Amaranthes* (as a certain plant is named), and so it is called, *A crown of glory that fades not away*.[119]

No change at all there, no winter and summer: not like the poor comforts here, but a bliss always flourishing. The grief of the saints here, is not so much for the changes of outward things, as of their inward comforts. *Suavis hora, sed brevis mora*—Sweet the hour, but short the tarrying. Sweet presences of God they sometimes have, but they are short and often interrupted; but *there* no cloud shall come between them and their Sun; they shall behold Him in His full brightness forever. As there shall be no change in their beholding, so no weariness nor abatement of their delight in beholding. They sing a new song, always the same, and yet always new. The sweetest of our music, if it were to be heard but for one whole day, would weary those who are most delighted with it. What we have here cloys, but satisfies not; the joys above never cloy, and yet always satisfy.

We should here consider the last property of this inheritance, namely, the *certainty* of it—*Reserved in heaven for you;* but that is connected with the following verse, and so will be fitly joined with it. Now for some use of all this.

If these things were believed, they would persuade for themselves; we should not need to add any entreaties to move you to seek after this inheritance. Have we not experience enough of the vanity and misery of things corruptible? and are not a great part of our days already spent amongst them? Is it not time to consider whether we are provided with anything surer and better than what we have here; whether we have any inheritance to go home to after our wandering? or can say with the Apostle, *We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?*[120]

If these things gain our assent while we hear them, yet it dies so. Scarcely any retire themselves after to follow forth those thoughts, and to make a work indeed of them; they busy their heads rather another way, building castles in the air, and spinning out their thoughts in vain contrivances.—Happy are those whose hearts the Spirit of God sets and fixes upon this inheritance: they may join in with the Apostle, and say, as here, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which has begotten us again unto this lively hope, to this inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away*.

1Pe 1:5

Ver. 5. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

It is no doubt a great contentment to the children of God, to hear of the excellences of the life to come; they are not readily weary of that subject; yet there is one doubt, which, if not removed, may dampen their delight in hearing and considering of all the rest. The richer the estate is, the more it will kindle the malice and diligence of their enemies to deprive them of it, and to cut them short of possessing it. And this they know, that those spiritual powers that seek to ruin them, are far more than their match, both in craft and force.

Against the fears of this, the Apostle comforts the heirs of salvation, assuring them, that, as the estate they look for is excellent, so it is certain and safe, laid up where it is out of the reach of all adverse powers, *reserved in heaven for you*. Besides that this is a further evidence of the worth and excellence of this inheritance, it makes it sure. It confirms what was said of its excellence; for it must be a thing of greatest worth, that is laid up in the highest and best place of the world, namely, in heaven, for you, where nothing that is impure once enters, much less is laid up and kept. Thus, the land where this inheritance lies, makes good all that has been spoken of the dignity and riches of it.

But further, as it is a rich and pleasant country where it lies, it has also this privilege, to be the only land of rest and peace, free from all possibility of invasion. There is no spoiling of it, and laying it waste, and defacing its beauty, by leading armies into it, and making it the seat of war; no noise of drums or trumpets, no inundations of one people driving out another and sitting down in their possessions. In a word, as there is nothing there subject to decay of itself, so neither is it in danger of fraud or violence. When our Savior speaks of this same happiness in a similar term, what is here called an *inheritance*, is there called a *treasure*. He expresses the permanence of it by these two, that it has *neither moth nor rust* in itself to *corrupt* it, nor can *thieves break through* and *steal* it.[121] There is a worm at the root of all our enjoyments here, corrupting causes within themselves; and besides that, they are exposed to injury from without, which may deprive us of them. How many stately palaces, which have been possibly many years in building, has fire upon a very small beginning destroyed in a few hours! What great hopes of gain by traffic has one tempest mocked and disappointed! How many who have thought their possessions very sure, yet have lost them by some trick of law, and others, as in time of war, been driven from them by the sword! Nothing is free from all danger but this *inheritance*, which is laid up in the hands of God, and kept in Heaven for us. The highest stations in the world, namely, the estate of kings, they are but mountains of prey, one robbing and spoiling another; but in that holy mountain above, there is none to hurt or spoil, or offer violence.[122] What the prophet speaks of the Church here, is more perfectly and eminently true of it above.

This is, indeed, a necessary condition of our joy in the thoughts of this happy estate, that we have some persuasion of our propriety, that it is ours; that we do not speak and hear of it, as travelers passing by a pleasant place behold and speak of its fair structure, the sweetness of the seat, the planting, the gardens, the meadows that are about it, and so pass on; having no further interest in it. But when we hear of this glorious inheritance, this treasure, this kingdom that is pure, and rich, and lasting, we may add, It is mine, it is reserved in Heaven, and reserved for me: I have received the evidences and the earnest of it; and, as it is kept safe for me, so I shall likewise be preserved to it, and that is the other part of the certainty that completes the comforts of it.[123]

The salvation that Christ has purchased is, indeed, laid up in Heaven, but we who seek after it, are on earth, surrounded by dangers and temptations. What benefit is it to us that our salvation is in Heaven, in the place of safety and quietness, while we ourselves are tossed upon the stormy seas of this world, amidst rocks and shelves, every hour in danger of shipwreck? Our inheritance is in a sure hand indeed, our enemies cannot come at it; but they may overrun and destroy us at their pleasure, for we are in the midst of them. Thus might we think and complain, and lose the sweetness of all our other thoughts concerning Heaven, if there were not as firm a promise for our own safety in the midst of our dangers, as there is of the safety of our inheritance that is out of danger.

The assurance is full, thus; it is kept for us in Heaven, and we kept on earth for it; as it is reserved for us, we are no less surely preserved to it. There is here, 1. The estate itself, *salvation*. 2. The preservation, or securing, of those that expect it, *kept*. 3. The time of full possession, *in the last time*.

1. The estate—*Unto salvation*. Before it is called an inheritance; here we are more particularly told what is meant by that, namely, *salvation*. This is more expressly sure, being a deliverance from misery, and it signifies also, the possession of perfect happiness. The first part of our happiness is, to be freed from those miseries to which we are subject by our guiltiness; to be set free, 1. From the curse of the law, and the wrath of God, from everlasting death. 2. From all kind of mortality or decaying. 3. From all power and stain of sin. 4. From all temptation. 5. From all the griefs and afflictions of this life. To have the perfection of grace, to be full of holiness; and the perfection of bliss, full of joy in the continual vision of God!—but how little we are able to say of this, our Apostle here teaches us, in that it is veiled to us; only so much shines through, as we are capable of here; but the revealed knowledge of it is only in the possession: it is *to be revealed in the last time*.

2*dly*. Their preservation, with the causes of it, *kept by the power of God through faith*. The inheritance is kept not only in safety, but in quietness. The children of God, for whom it is kept, while they are here, are kept safe indeed, but not unmolested and unassaulted; they have enemies, and such as are stirring, and cunning, and powerful; but in the midst of them, they are guarded and defended; they perish not, according to the prayer of our Savior poured out for them, *I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil*.[124]

They have the prince of the power of the air, and all his armies, all the forces he can make, against them. Though his power is nothing but tyranny and usurpation, yet because once they were under his yoke, he stirs himself to pursue them, when they are led forth from their captivity, as Pharaoh, with all his chariots and horses and horsemen, pursued the Israelites going out of Egypt.

The word in the original here translated *kept*, is a military term, used for those who are kept, as in a fort or garrison-town besieged. So Satan is still raising batteries against this fort, using all ways to take it, by strength or stratagem, unwearied in his assaults, and very skilful to know his advantages, and where we are weakest, there to set on. And besides all this, he has intelligence with a party within us, ready to betray us to him; so that it would be impossible for us to hold out, if there were not another watch and guard than our own, and other walls and bulwarks than any that our skill and industry can raise for our own defense. In this, then, is our safety, that there is a power above our own, yes, and above all our enemies, that guards us; salvation itself our walls and bulwarks. We ought to watch, but when we do so in obedience to our commander, the Captain of our salvation, yet it is His own watching, who *sleeps* not, nor so much as *slumbers*, it is *that* which preserves us, and makes ours not to be in vain.[125] And therefore those two are jointly commanded, *Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation*.[126] *Watch*, there is the necessity of our diligence; *Pray*, there is the insufficiency of it, and the necessity of His watching, by whose power we are effectually preserved, and that power is our fort. *Salvation* has God appointed *for walls and bulwarks*.[127] What is more safe than to be walled with *Salvation* itself? So, *The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runs into it, and is safe*.[128]

Now the causes of our preservation are two, 1. Supreme, *The Power of God*. 2. Subordinate, *Faith*. The supreme *power of God* is that on which our stability and perseverance depends. When we consider how weak we are in ourselves, yea, the very strongest among us, and how assaulted, we wonder, and justly we may, that any can continue one day in the state of grace: but when we look on the strength by which we are guarded, the power of God, then we see the reason for our stability to the end; for Omnipotence supports us, and the everlasting arms are under us.

Then *Faith* is the second cause of our preservation; because it applies the first cause, the *Power of God*. Our faith lays hold upon this power, and this power strengthens faith, and so we are preserved; it puts us within those walls, sets the soul within the guard of the power of God, which by self-confidence and vain presumption in its own strength, is exposed to all kinds of danger. Faith is a humble, self-denying grace; it makes the Christian nothing in himself, and all in God.

The weakest persons who are within a strong place, women and children, though they were not able to resist the enemy, if they were alone, yet so long as the place where they are is of sufficient strength, and well manned, and every way accommodated to hold out, they are in safety; thus, the weakest believer is safe, because by believing he is within the strongest of all defenses. Faith is the victory, and Christ sets His strength against Satan's; and when the Christian is hard beset with some temptation, too strong for himself, then he looks up to Him who is the great conqueror of the powers of darkness, and calls to Him, "Now, Lord, assist Your servant in this encounter, and put to Your strength, that the glory may be Yours." Thus, faith is such an engine, as draws in the power of God, and His Son Jesus into the works and conflicts that it has in hand. *This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith*.[129]

It is the property of a good Christian to magnify the power of God, and to have high thoughts of it, and therefore it is his privilege to find safety in that power. David cannot satisfy himself with one or two expressions of it, but delights in multiplying them. *The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower*.[130] Faith looks above all, both that which the soul has, and that which it wants, and answers all doubts and fears with this Almighty power upon which it rests.

3*dly*. The time of full possession—*Ready to be revealed in the last time*. This salvation is that great work wherein God intended to manifest the glory of His grace, contrived before time, and in the several ages of the world brought forward, after the decreed manner; and the full accomplishment of it reserved for the end of time.

The souls of the faithful enter into the possession of it, when they depart from their houses of clay; yet their happiness is not complete until that great day of the appearing of Jesus Christ. They are naturally imperfect until their bodies are raised and rejoined to their souls, to partake together of their bliss; and they are mystically imperfect, until all the rest of the members of Jesus Christ are added to them.

But then shall their joy be absolutely full, when both their own bodies, and the mystical body of Christ shall be glorified; when all the children of that glorious family shall meet, and sit down to that great marriage supper at their Father's table. Then shall the music of that new song be full, when there is not one missing of those who are appointed to sing it for eternity. In that day shall our Lord Jesus *be glorified in his saints, and admired in all those who believe*.[131]

You see what it is that the Gospel offers you, and you may gather how great both your folly and your guiltiness will be, if you neglect and slight so great salvation when it is brought to you, and you are entreated to receive it. This is all that the preaching of the word aims at, and yet, who hearkens to it? How few lay hold on this eternal life, this inheritance, this crown, that is held forth to all that hear of it!

Oh! that you could be persuaded to be saved; that you would be willing to embrace salvation! You think you would; but if it be so, then I may say, though you would be saved, yet your custom of sin, your love to sin, and love to the world, will not permit you; and these will still hinder you, unless you put on holy resolutions to break through them, and trample them underfoot, and take this kingdom by a hand of violence, which God is so well pleased with. He is willingly overcome by that force, and gives this kingdom most willingly, where it is so taken; it is not attained by slothfulness, and sitting still with folded hands; it must be invaded with strength of faith, with armies of prayers and tears; and those who set upon it thus are sure to take it.

Consider what we are doing, how we misplace our diligence on things that abide not, or we abide not to enjoy them. *Here have we no continuing city*,[132] says the Apostle, but he adds that which comforts the citizens of the New Jerusalem, We look for one to come, *whose builder and maker is God*.[133] Hear not these things idly, as if they concerned you not, but let them move you to resolution and actions. Say as they said of *Canaan*, It is a good land, *let us go up at once and possess it*.[134] Learn to use what you have here as travelers, and let your home, your inheritance, your treasure be on high, which is by far the richest and the safest; and if it is so with you, then *Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*.[135]

1Pe 1:6

Ver. 6. Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations.

The same motives cannot beget contrary passions in the soul; therefore, the Apostle reduces the mixture of sorrowing and rejoicing that is usual in the heart of a Christian to the different causes of them, and shows which of the two has the stronger cause, and therefore is always predominant in him who entertains and considers it aright.

His scope is, to stir up and strengthen spiritual joy in his afflicted brethren; and therefore, having set the matter of it before them in the preceding verses, he now applies it, and expressly opposes it to their distresses.

Some read these words exhortatively, *In which rejoice you.* It is so intended; but I conceive it serves that end better indicatively, as we now read it, *In which you rejoice*. It exhorts more insinuatively and persuasively, that it may be so, to urge it on them that it is so. Thus St. Paul, *King Agrippa, Do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe*. And straight he answered, *You almost persuade me to be a Christian*.[136] This implies how just and how reasonable it is, that the things spoken of should make them glad; in these they will rejoice, yea, do rejoice. Certainly, if you know and consider what the causes of your joy are, you cannot choose but find it within you, and in such a measure as to swallow up all your temporary sorrows, how great and however many their causes are.

We are then to consider severally these bitter waters and sweet, this sorrow and this joy. 1. In their springs; 2. In their streams.

And first, they are called *temptations*, and *manifold temptations*. The habits of divine supernatural grace are not acquirable by human study, or by industry, or by exercise; they are of immediate infusion from Heaven; yet are they infused to the end that they may act and exercise themselves in the several conditions and occurrences of a Christian's life; and by that they grow stronger. Whatever oppositions or difficulties grace meets with in its acting, go under this general name of temptations. It is not necessary to reckon up the variety of senses of this word, in its full latitude; how God is said to tempt man, and how it is said that He tempts him not; how man tempts God, and how it is said that God is not tempted; how Satan tempts men, and men one another, and a man himself; all these are several acceptations of this word: but the temptations here meant, are those by which men are tempted, and particularly the saints of God. And though there is nothing in the words, that may not agree to all sorts of temptations which godly are subject to; yet I conceive it is particularly meant of their afflictions and distresses, as the Apostle James likewise uses it, chap. 1 ver. 2.

And they are so called, because they give particular and notable proof of the temper of a Christian's spirit, and draw forth evidence both of the truth and the measure of the grace that is in them. If they fail and are foiled, as sometimes they are, this convinces them of that human frailty and weakness which is in them, and so humbles them, and drives them out of themselves to depend upon Another for more strength and better success in after-encounters. If they acquit themselves like Christians indeed (the Lord managing and assisting that grace which He has given them), then all their valor, and strength, and victories turn to His praise, from whom they have received all.

A man is not only unknown to others but to himself, who has never met with such difficulties as require faith, and Christian fortitude, and patience to surmount them. How shall a man know whether his meekness and calmness of spirit be real or not, while he meets with no provocation, nothing that contradicts or crosses him? But when something sets upon him, that is in itself very unpleasant and grievous to him, and yet, if in that case he retains his moderation of spirit, and flies not out into impatience, either against God or men, this gives experiment of the truth and soundness of that grace within him; whereas standing water which is clear at the top while it is untouched, yet if it has mud at the bottom, stir it a little, and it rises presently.

It is not altogether unprofitable, yea, it is great wisdom in Christians to be arming themselves against such temptations as may befall them hereafter, though they have not as yet met with them; to labor to overcome them beforehand, to suppose the hardest things that may be incident to them, and to put on the strongest resolutions they can attain unto. Yet all that is but an imaginary effort; and therefore there is no assurance that the victory is any more than imaginary too, till it comes to action, and then, those who have spoken and thought very confidently, may prove but (as one said of the Athenians) *fortes in tabula*, patient and courageous in picture or fancy; and notwithstanding all their arms, and dexterity in handling them by way of exercise, may be foully defeated when they are to fight in earnest. *The children of Ephraim being armed, and carrying bows* (says the Psalmist), *turned back in the day of battle*.[137] It is the battle that tries the soldier, and the storm the pilot. How would it appear that Christians can be themselves, not only patient but cheerful in poverty, in disgrace, and temptations, and persecutions, if it were not often their lot to meet with them? He who framed the heart, knows it to be but deceitful, and He who gives grace knows the weakness and strength of it exactly; yet He is pleased to speak thus, that by afflictions and hard tasks He tries what is in the hearts of His children. For the word of God speaks to men, and therefore it speaks the language of the children of men; thus:—*Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me*.[138]

God delights to call forth His champions to meet with great temptations, to make them bear crosses of more than ordinary weight; as commanders in war put men of most valor and skill upon the hardest services. God sets some strong furious trial upon a strong Christian, made strong by His own grace, and by his victory makes it appear to the world, that though there is a great deal of the counterfeit coin of profession in religion, yet some there are, who have the power, the reality of it, and that it is not an invention, but there is truth in it; that the invincible grace, the very Spirit of God dwells in the hearts of true believers; that He has a number who do not only speak big, but do indeed and in good earnest despise the world, and overcome it by His strength. Some men take delight to see some kind of beasts, fight together: but to see a Christian mind encountering some great affliction and conquering it, to see his valor in not sinking at the hardest distresses of this life, nor the most frightful end of it, the cruelest kinds of death, for His sake,—this is (as one said) *dignum Deo spectaculum*—A spectacle worthy of God; this is a combat which God delights to look upon, and He is not a mere beholder in it, for it is the power of His own grace that enables and supports the Christian in all those conflicts and temptations.

Through manifold temptations.] This expresses a multitude of temptations, and those too of various kinds, many and manifold. It were no hard condition to have a trial now and then, with long ease and prosperity between; but to be plied with one affliction at the heels of another, to have them come thronging in by multitudes and of different kinds, uncouth, unaccustomed evils, such as a man has not been acquainted with before, this is that which is often the portion of those who are the beloved of God: *Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your water-spouts: all your waves and your billows are gone over me*.[139]

You are in heaviness.] This the Apostle blames not, but aims at the moderating of it. Seek not altogether to dry up this stream, but to bound it, and keep it within its banks. Grace does not destroy the life of nature, but adds to it a life more excellent; yes, grace not only permits, but *requires* some feeling of afflictions. There is an affected pride of spirit in some men, instead of patience, suitable to the doctrine of the Stoics as it is usually taken: they strive not to feel at all the afflictions that are on them: but this is to despise the correction of the Lord, which is alike forbidden as fainting under it.[140] We should not stop our ears, but *hear the rod, and who has appointed it*, as the prophet speaks.[141] Where there is no feeling at all, there can be no patience. Consider it as the hand of God, and thence argue the soul into submission. *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because you did it*.[142] But this heaviness is mitigated, and yet, as it were, within its banks, between these two considerations—1. The utility, 2. The brevity of it: the profitableness, and the shortness of it.

To a worldly man, great gain sweetens the hardest labor; and to a Christian, spiritual profit and advantage may do much to move him to take those afflictions well which are otherwise very unpleasant. Though they are not joyous for the present, yet this allays the sorrow of them, the fruit that grows out of them, that *peaceable fruit of righteousness*.[143]

A bundle of folly is in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall beat it out,[144] says Solomon. Though the children of God are truly (as our Savior calls them) the children of wisdom, yet, being renewed only in part, they are not altogether free from those follies that call for this rod to beat them out, and sometimes have such a bundle of follies as requires a bundle of rods to be spent upon it—many and manifold afflictions.

It is not an easy matter to be drawn from, nor to be beaten from, the love of this world, and this is what God mainly requires of His children, that they be not in love with the world, nor the things of it; for that is contrary to the love of God, and so far as that is entertained, this is wanting. And if in the midst of afflictions they are sometimes subject to this disease, how would it grow upon them with ease and prosperity! When they are beaten from one worldly folly or delight, they are ready, through nature's corruption, to lay hold upon some other,—being thrust out from it at one door, to enter at some other; as children unwilling to be weaned, if one breast be embittered, they seek to the other; and therefore there must be something to drive them from that too. Thus it is clear there is need, great need for afflictions, yes, of many afflictions, that the saints be *chastened of the Lord*, that they may not be *condemned with the world*.[145]

There are many illustrations of this truth, in things both of nature and of art, some common, and others choicer; but these are not necessary. The experience of Christians tells them, how easily they grow proud, and secure, and carnal, with a little ease, and when outward things go smoothly with them; and therefore what unhappiness were it for them to be very happy that way.

Let us learn, then, that considering our present frailty there is need of afflictions, and so not promise ourselves exemption, however calm our seas are for the present; and then for the number, and measure, and weight of them, to resign that wholly into the hands of our wise Father and Physician, who perfectly knows our mold and our maladies, and what kind and quantity of chastisement is necessary for our cure.

Though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness.] The other consideration that moderates this heaviness is its shortness. Because we willingly forget eternity, therefore this moment seems much in our eyes: but, if we could look upon it rightly, of how little importance is it what be our condition here! If it were as prosperous as we could wish or imagine, it is but for a little season. The rich man in the Gospel talked of many years, but *you fool, this night your soul shall be required of you*,[146] was the longest period. The many years are quickly drawn to a very great abatement, and if full of pains and griefs, those do help to put an end to themselves, and hasten to it. Well then might St. Austin say, *Hic ure, caede, modoibi parcas*—Use me here as pleases you, so as that hereafter it may be well with me.

Wherein.] This word, though it cannot fall amiss, being referred to any particular to which interpreters have appropriated it, yet it is rather to be taken as relative to the whole complex sense of the preceding verses, concerning the hope of glory. In this thing you rejoice, that you are begotten again,—that there is such an inheritance, and that you are made heirs of it,—that it is kept for you, and you for it,—that nothing can come between you and it, to disappoint you of possessing and enjoying it,—that though there be many deserts, and mountains, and seas in the way, yet you are assured that you shall come there safely.

This is but one thing; but the cause of your grief is *temptations*, and *manifold temptations;* yet this one thing weighs down that entire multitude. The heart being grieved in one thing naturally looks out for its ease to some other; and there is usually something that is a man's great comfort, that he turns his thoughts to, when he is crossed and afflicted in other things; but in this lies the folly of the world, that the things they choose for their refuge and comfort are such as may change themselves, and turn into discomfort and sorrow; but the godly man, who is the fool in the natural man's eyes, goes beyond all the rest in his wise choice in this. He rises above all that is subject to change, casts his anchor within the veil. That in which he rejoices is still a matter of joy unmovable and unalterable; though not only his estate, but the whole world were turned upside down, yet this is the same, or rather, in the Psalmist's words, *Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea*.[147] When we shall receive that rich and pure and abiding inheritance, that salvation which shall be revealed in the last time, and when time itself shall cease to be, then there shall be no more counting our joys by days and hours, but they shall run parallel with eternity. Then all our love, that is now scattered and parceled out upon the vanities amongst which we are here, shall be united and gathered into one, and fixed upon God, and the soul filled with the delight of His presence.

The sorrow was limited and bounded by the considerations we spoke of; but this joy, this exultation, and leaping for joy (for so it is) is not bounded, it cannot be too much; its measure is, to know no measure. The afflictions, the matter of heaviness, are but a transient touch of pain; but that upon which this joy is built is most permanent, the measure of it cannot exceed, for the matter of it is infinite and eternal, beyond all hyperbole. There is no expression we have which can reach it, much less go beyond it; itself is the hyperbole, still surpassing all that can be said of it. Even in the midst of heaviness itself, such is this joy that it can maintain itself in the depth of sorrow; this oil of gladness still swims above, and cannot be drowned by all the floods of affliction, yes, it is often sweetest in the greatest distress. Then the soul relishes spiritual joy best, when it is not glutted with worldly delights, but finds them turned into bitterness.

For application. In that we profess ourselves Christians, we all pretend to be the sons of God, and so heirs of this glory; and if each man were particularly asked, he would say, he hoped to attain it; but were there nothing else, this might abundantly convince us that the greatest part of us delude ourselves, and are deceived in this; for how few are there who do really find this height of joy, of gladness and exultation, in their thoughts and hopes of it, who daily refresh and gladden themselves with the consideration of what is laid up for them above, more than with all their enjoyments here below!

Consider how the news of some small outward advantage that is to come to us raises our light vain hearts, and makes them leap within us; and yet this news of a kingdom prepared for us (if we be indeed believers), stirs us not; our hearts are as little affected with it as if it concerned us not at all: and this is too clear an evidence against us, that indeed it concerns us not, that our portion as yet is not in it.

In what a fool's paradise will men be with the thoughts of worthless things, and such things too as they shall never obtain, nor ever shall have any further being than what they have in their imagination! And how will men frequently roll over in their minds the thoughts of any pleasant thing they hope for! And yet we, who say we have hopes of the glory to come, can pass many days without one hour spent in the rejoicing thought of the happiness we look for! If any person of a lowly condition for the present were assured of becoming very rich and advancing to great honor within a week, and after that to live to a great age in that exalted position, enjoying health and all imaginable pleasures, judge whether in the few days between the knowledge of that news and the enjoyment of it, the thoughts of what he were to attain to would not be frequent with him, and be always welcome. There is no comparison between all we can imagine this way and the hopes we speak of; and yet, how seldom are our thoughts upon those things, and how faint and slender is our rejoicing in them! Can we deny that it is the unbelief of these things, which causes this neglect, and forgetting of them? The discourse, the tongue of men and angels cannot produce Divine belief of the happiness to come; only He who gives it, gives faith likewise to apprehend it, and lay hold upon it, and, upon our believing, to be filled with joy in the hopes of it.

1Pe 1:7

Ver. 7. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

The path of the just (says Solomon) *is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day*.[148] Still forging ahead, and ascending towards perfection, moving as fast when they are clouded with affliction as at any time else; yes, all that seems to work against them furthers them. Those graces that would possibly grow heavy and unwieldy by too much ease, are held in breath, and increase their activity and strength by conflict. Divine grace, even in the heart of weak and sinful man, is an invincible thing. Drown it in the waters of adversity, it rises more beautiful as not being drowned indeed, but only washed; throw it into the furnace of fiery trials, it comes out purer, and loses nothing but the dross which our corrupt nature mixes with it. Thus the Apostle here expounds the *if need be* of the former verse, and so justifies the joy in afflictions, which there he speaks of, by their usefulness, and the advantage faith derives from them: it is so tried that it shall appear in its full brightness at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The peculiar treasure of a Christian being the grace which he receives from Heaven, and particularly that sovereign grace of faith; whatever he can be assured will better him any way in this, he will not only bear patiently, but gladly embrace it.[149] Therefore the Apostle sets this before his brethren in those words of this verse which express, 1. The worth and excellence of faith; 2. The usefulness of temptations in relation to it.

1st, The worth and excellence of faith. The trial of faith is called *more precious*, a work of more worth than the trial of gold, because faith itself is of more value than gold. The Apostle chooses this comparison as fitting his purpose to illustrate both the worth of faith, and likewise the use of temptations, representing the one by gold, and the other by the trying of gold in the fire.

The worth of gold is, 1. Real; the purest and most precious of all metals, having many excellent properties beyond them, as those who write of the nature of gold observe. 2. Far greater in the esteem and opinion of men. See how men hurry up and down, over sea and land, unwearied in their pursuit, with hazard of life, and often with the loss of uprightness and a good conscience; and not only thus esteem it in itself, but make it the rule of their esteem one of another, valuing men less or more as they are more or less furnished with it. And we see at what a height this is; for things we would commend much, we borrow its name to describe them, *e.g.* golden mediocrity: and that age which they would call the best of all, they name it the golden age; and as Seneca observes, describing heavenly things (as Ovid the sun's palace and chariot), still gold is the word for all.

And the Holy Scriptures, descending to our reach, set forth the riches of the new Jerusalem by it[150] and the excellence of Christ.[151] And here the preciousness of faith, of which Christ is the object, is said to be *more precious than gold.*

I will not insist on the parallel of faith with gold in the other qualities of it, as that it is pure and solid as gold, and that it is most ductile and malleable, as gold beyond all other metals; it plies any way with the will of God. But then faith truly enriches the soul; and as gold answers all things, so faith gives the soul propriety in all the rich consolations of the Gospel, in all the promises of life and salvation, in all needful blessings; it draws virtue from Christ to strengthen itself, and all other graces.

And thus it is not only precious as gold, but goes far above the comparison; it is *more precious*, yes, *much more precious*, 1. In its original; the other is dug out of the bowels of the earth; but the mine of this gold is above, it comes from Heaven. 2. In its nature, answerable to its original, it is immaterial, spiritual, and pure. We refine gold and make it purer, but when we receive faith pure in itself, we mix dross with it, and make it impure by the alloy of unbelief. 3. In its endurance flowing from the former; it perishes not. Gold is a thing in itself corruptible and perishing, and to particular owners it perishes in their loss of it, they being deprived of it any way.

Other graces are likewise tried in the same furnace; but Faith is named as the root of all the rest. Sharp afflictions give a Christian a trial of his love to God, whether it be single and for Himself or not; for then it will be the same when He strikes as when He embraces, and in the fire of affliction will rather grow the hotter, and be more taken off from the world, and set upon Him. Again, the grace of patience is put particularly upon trial in distresses. But both these spring from faith; for love rises from a right and strong belief of the goodness of God, and patience from a persuasion of the wisdom and love of God, and the truth of His promises. He has said, *I will not fail you*,[152] and that we shall not be tempted above our strength, and He will give the issue. Now the belief of these things causes patience. *The trying of your faith works patience.*[153] For therefore does the Christian resign up himself, and all that concerns him—his trials, the measure and length of them all, to God's disposal, because he knows that he is in the hands of a wise and loving Father. Thus the trial of these and other particular graces still resolves into this, and is comprised under it, *the trial of faith*. This brings us,

2dly, To the usefulness of temptations in relation to it.

This trial (as that of gold) may be for a twofold end. 1. For experiment of the truth and pureness of a Christian's faith. 2. For refining it yet more, and raising it to a higher pitch or degree of pureness.

1. The furnace of affliction shows upright real faith to be such indeed, remaining still the same even in the fire, the same that it was, undiminished, as good gold loses none of its quantity in the fire. Doubtless many are deceived in time of ease and prosperity, with imaginary faith and fortitude: so that there may be still some doubt, while a man is underset with outward helps, as riches, friends, esteem, &c., whether he leans upon those or upon God, who is an invisible support, though stronger than all that are visible, and is the peculiar and only stay of faith in all conditions. But when all these outward props are plucked away from a man, then it will be revealed, whether something else upholds him or not: for if there be nothing else, then he falls; but if his mind stands firm and unmoved as before, then it is evident he laid not his weight upon these things which he had then about him, but was built upon a foundation though not seen, which is able alone to sustain him, although he be not only frustrated of all other supports, but beaten upon with storms and tempests; as our Savior says, the house *fell not, for it was founded upon a rock*.[154]

This testified the truth of *David's* faith, who found it staying him upon God, when there was nothing else near that could do it; *I had fainted, unless I had believed.*[155] So in his difficulty, where it is said that *David was greatly distressed; but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.*[156] Thus, *My flesh and my heart fails: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.*[157] The heart's natural strength of spirit and resolution may bear up under outward weakness, or the failing of the flesh; but when the heart itself fails, which is the strength of the flesh, what shall strengthen it? Nothing but God, who is the strength of the heart and its portion forever. Thus faith works alone, when the case suits that of the Prophet's. *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, &c., yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*[158]

In spiritual trials, which are the sharpest and most fiery of all, when the furnace is within a man, when God not only shuts up His lovingkindness from his feeling, but seems to shut it up in hot displeasure; when He writes bitter things against him, yet then to depend upon Him, and wait for His salvation, and the more He smites the more to cleave to Him,—this is not only a true, but a strong and very refined faith indeed. Well might he say, *When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold*,[159] who could say that word, *Though he slay me, yet will trust in him*:[160] though I saw, as it were, His hand lifted up to destroy me, yet from that same hand would I expect salvation.

2. As the furnace shows faith to be what it is, so also it improves it, and makes it more precious and purer than it was.

The graces of the Spirit, as they come from the hand of God who infuses them, are nothing but pureness; but being put into a heart where sin dwells, (which, till the body be dissolved, and taken to pieces, cannot be fully purged out,) there they are mixed with corruption and dross: and particularly, faith is mixed with unbelief, and love of earthly things, and dependence upon the creature, if not more than God, yet together with Him; and for this is the furnace necessary, so that the soul may be purified from this dross, and made more sublime and spiritual in believing. It is a hard task, and many times comes but slowly forward, to teach the heart, by discourse and speculation, to sit loose from the world at all sides, not to cleave to the best things in it, although we are surrounded by them; though riches increase, yet, not to set our hearts on them,[161] not to trust in such *uncertain* things as they are, as the Apostle speaks.[162] Therefore God is pleased to choose the more effective way to teach His own the right and pure exercise of faith, either by withholding or withdrawing those things from them. He makes them savor the sweetness of spiritual comfort, by depriving them of those outward comforts upon which they were in most danger to have doted to excess, and so forget themselves and Him. When they are reduced to necessity, and experimentally trained up easily to let go their hold of anything earthly, and to stay themselves only upon their rock, this is the very refining of their faith, by those losses and afflictions wherewith they are exercised. Those who learn bodily exercises, as fencing, &c., are not taught by sitting still, and hearing rules or seeing others practice, but they learn by exercising themselves. The way to profit in the art of believing, or of coming to this spiritual activity of faith, is, to be often put to that work in the most difficult way, to make up all wants and losses in God, and to sweeten the bitterest griefs with His lovingkindness.

Might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory.] This is the end that is intended, and shall be certainly obtained by all these hot trials. Faith shall come through them all, and *shall be found unto praise, &c.* An unskillful beholder may think it strange to see gold thrown into the fire, and left there for a time; but he who puts it there, would be loath to lose it; his purpose is to make some costly piece of work of it. Every believer gives himself to Christ, and He undertakes to present them blameless to the Father; not one of them shall be lost, nor one drachma of their faith; they shall be found, and their faith shall be found, when He appears. That faith which is here in the furnace, shall be then made up into a crown of pure gold; *it shall be found unto praise, and honor, and glory*.

This praise, and honor, and glory, may be referred, either to believers themselves, according to the Apostle St. Paul's expression,[163] or to Christ who appears: but the two will agree well together, that it be both to their praise, and to the praise of Christ; for certainly, all their praise and glory shall terminate in the glory of their head—Christ, who is God, blessed for ever. They have each their crown, but their honor is, to cast them all down before His throne. *He shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all those who believe.*[164] They shall be glorious in Him; and therefore in all their glory He shall be glorified; for as they have derived their glory from Him, it shall all return back to Him again.

At the appearance of Jesus Christ.] This denotes the time when this shall come to pass; for Christ is faithful and true; He has promised to come again, and to judge the world in righteousness, and He will come and will not tarry. He shall judge righteously in that day, who was Himself unrighteously judged here on earth. It is called the *Revelation;* all other things shall be revealed in that day; the most hidden things, good and evil, unveiled; but it is eminently the day of *His Revelation;* it shall be by His light, by the brightness of His coming, that all other things shall be revealed; but He Himself shall be the worthiest sight of all. All eyes shall behold Him. He shall then gloriously appear before all men and angels, shall by all be acknowledged to be the Son of God and Judge of the world: some shall with joy own Him, and acknowledge Him to be so; others to their horror and amazement. How beautiful shall He be to those who love Him, when He as the glorious Head shall appear with His whole body mystical together with Him!

Then the glory and praise which all the saints shall be honored with, shall recompense fully all the scorns and ignominies and distresses they have met with here. And they shall shine the brighter for them. Oh! if we considered often that solemn day, how lightly should we regard the opinions of men, and all outward hardships that can befall us! How easily should we digest dispraise and dishonor here, and pass through all cheerfully, provided we may be then found in Him, and so partakers of *praise, and honor, and glory*, in that day of His appearing!

1Pe 1:8-9

Ver. 8. Whom having not seen, you love; in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

Ver. 9. Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

It is a paradox to the world which the Apostle has asserted, that there is a joy that can subsist in the midst of sorrow; therefore he insists in the confirmation of it, and in all these words proves it to the full, yes, with advantage, that the saints have not only some measure of joy in the griefs that abound upon them here, but excellent and eminent joy, such as makes good all that can be said of it, such as cannot be spoken too much of, for it is *unspeakable*, nor too much magnified, for it is *glorious*.

To evidence the truth of this, and to confirm his brethren in the experienced knowledge of it, he expresses here more particularly and distinctly the causes of this their joy, which are,

1. The *object* or *matter* of it; 2. the *apprehension* and *appropriation* of that object: which two conjoined, are the entire cause of all rejoicing.

1. The *object* is Jesus Christ, ver. 8, and the salvation purchased by Him, ver. 9. For these two cannot be severed, and these two verses that speak of them, require (as is evident by their connection) to be considered together.

2. The apprehension of these is set forth, first, negatively, not by bodily sight; secondly, positively: whereas it might seem to abate the certainty and liveliness of their rejoicing, that it is of things they had not seen, nor do yet see; this is abundantly made up by three for one, each of them more excellent than the mere bodily sight of Christ in the flesh, which any had who were never the better by it: the three things are, those three prime Christian graces, faith, love, and hope; the two former in ver. 8, the third in ver. 9. Faith in Christ begetting love to Him, and both these giving assured hope of salvation by Him, making it as certain to them, as if it were already in their hand, and they in possession of it. And from all these together results this exultation, or leaping for joy, *joy unspeakable, and full of glory*.

This is that *one thing*[165] that so much concerns us: and therefore we mistake very far, and forget our own highest interest too much, when we either speak or hear of it slightly, and apply not our hearts to it. What is it that all our thoughts and endeavors drive at? What means all that we are doing in the world? Though we take several ways to it, and wrong ways for the most part, yes, such ways as lead not to it, but set us further off from it; yet what we all seek after by all our labor under the sun, is something that may be matter of contentment and rejoicing to us when we have attained it. Now here it is, and it is sought for elsewhere in vain. And for this end it is represented to you, that it may be yours, if you will entertain it; not only that you may know this to be a truth, that true consolation and rejoicing is laid up in Jesus Christ, that He is the magazine and treasury of it, but that you may know how to bring Him home into your hearts, and lodge Him there, and so to have the spring of joy within you.

That which gives full joy to the soul, must be something that is higher and better than itself. In a word, He who made it, can alone make it glad after this manner, with *unspeakable and glorious joy*. But the soul remaining guilty of rebellion against Him and unreconciled, cannot behold Him but as an enemy; any belief that it can have of Him while it is in that posture, is not such as can fetch *love*, and *hope*, and so *rejoicing*, but such as the faith of devils produces, only begetting terror and trembling. But the light of His countenance, shining in the face of His Son the Mediator, gladdens the heart; and it is the looking upon Him as such, that causes the soul to *believe*, and *love*, and *hope*, and *rejoice*. Therefore the Apostle, in his description of the state of the Gentiles before Christ was preached to them,[166] joins these together: *Without Christ*—that was the cause of all the rest,—therefore, without comfort in the promises, *without hope, and without God in the world*. So He is here by our Apostle expressed as the object. In all these, therefore, He is the matter of our joy, because our *faith*, and *love*, and *hope of salvation* are in Him.

The Apostle writing to the dispersed Jews, many of whom had not known or seen Christ in the flesh, commends their love and faith, for this reason, that it did not depend upon bodily sight, but was pure, and spiritual, and made them of the number of those whom our Savior Himself pronounces *blessed, that have not seen, and yet have believed.*[167] You saw Him not when He dwelt amongst men, and walked to and fro, preaching and working miracles. Many of those who did then hear and see Him believed not; yea, they scoffed, and hated, and persecuted Him, and in the end crucified Him; you have seen none of all those things, yet having heard the Gospel that declares Him, *you have believed*.

Thus observe, the working or not working of faith does not depend upon the difference of the external ministry and gifts of men; for what greater difference can there be that way than between the master and the servants, between the great Prophet Himself and His weak sinful messengers? and yet many of those who saw and heard Him in person were not converted, believed not in Him; and thousands who never saw Him were converted by His Apostles, and, as it seems, even some of those who were some way accessory to His death, yet were brought to repentance by this same Apostle's sermon.[168]

Learn, then, to look above the outward ministry, and any difference that in God's dispensation can be there; and know, that if Jesus Christ Himself were on earth, and now preaching amongst us, yet might His incomparable words be unprofitable to us, not being mixed with faith in the hearers. But where that is, the meanest and the most despicable conveyance of His message, received with humility and affection, will work blessed effects.

Whom not seeing, yet believing.] Faith elevates the soul not only above sense, and sensible things, but above reason itself. As reason corrects the errors which sense might occasion, so supernatural faith corrects the errors of natural reason, judging according to sense.

The sun seems less than the wheel of a chariot, but reason teaches the philosopher that it is much bigger than the whole earth, and the reason why it seems so little is, its great distance. The naturally wise man is as far deceived by his carnal reason, in his estimate of Jesus Christ, *the Sun of Righteousness*, and the cause is the same, his great distance from Him; as the Psalmist speaks of the wicked, *Your judgments are far above out of his sight.*[169] He accounts Christ and His glory a smaller matter than his own gain, honor, or pleasure; for these are near him, and he sees their quantity to the full, and counts them bigger, yes, far more worth than they are indeed. But the Apostle St. Paul, and all who are enlightened by the same Spirit, they know by faith, which is Divine reason, that the excellence of Jesus Christ far surpasses the worth of the whole earth, and all things earthly.[170]

To give a right assent to the Gospel of Christ is impossible, without Divine and saving faith infused in the soul. To believe that the eternal Son of God clothed Himself with human flesh, and dwelt amongst men in a tabernacle like theirs, and suffered death in the flesh; that He who was Lord of life has freed us from the sentence of eternal death; that He broke the bars and chains of death, and rose again; that He went up into Heaven, and there at the Father's right hand sits in our flesh, and that glorified above the Angels: this is the *great mystery of godliness*. And a part of this mystery is, that he is believed on in the world.[171] This, natural men may very knowledgeably speak of, and give a kind of natural credit to it, as to a history that may be true; but firmly to believe that there is Divine truth in all these things, and to have a persuasion of it stronger than of the very things we see with our eyes,—such an assent as this is the peculiar work of the Spirit of God, and is certainly saving faith.

The soul that so believes cannot choose but love. It is commonly true, that the eye is the ordinary door by which love enters into the soul, and it is true in respect of this love; though it is denied of the eye of sense, yet (you see) it is ascribed to the eye of faith; though you have not seen Him, you love Him, because you believe: which is to see Him spiritually. Faith, indeed, is distinguished from that vision which is in glory; but it is the vision of the kingdom of grace, it is the eye of the new creature, that quick-sighted eye which pierces all the visible heavens, and sees above them; which *looks at the things which are not seen*,[172] *and is the evidence of things not seen, seeing him who is invisible.*[173] It is possible that a person may be much beloved upon the report of his worth and virtues, and upon a picture of him vividly drawn, before sight of the party so commended and represented; but certainly when he is seen, and found answerable to the former, it raises the affection already begun to a far greater height. We have the report of the perfections of Jesus Christ in the Gospel; yes, so clear a description of Him, that it gives a picture of Him, and that, together with the sacraments, is the only lawful and the only lively picture of our Savior.[174] Now faith believes this report, and beholds this picture, and so lets in the love of Christ to the soul. But further, it gives a particular experimental knowledge of Christ, and acquaintance with Him; it causes the soul to find all that is spoken of Him in the word, and His beauty there represented, to be abundantly true: makes it really taste of His sweetness, and by that possesses the heart more strongly with His love, persuading it of the truth of those things, not by reasons and arguments, but by an inexpressible kind of evidence, which those only know who have it. Faith persuades a Christian of these two things that the philosopher gives as the causes of all love—beauty and propriety—the loveliness of Christ in Himself, and our interest in Him.

The former it effects not only by the first apprehending and believing of those His excellencies and beauty, but by frequent beholding of Him and eyeing Him in whom all perfection dwells; and it looks so often upon Him, until it sets the very impression of His image, as it were, upon the soul, so that it can never be blotted out and forgotten. The latter it does by that particular uniting act which makes Him our God and our Savior.

You love.] The distinctions which some make in love, need not be taken as signifying different kinds, but different actings of the same love, by which we may try our so much pretended love of Christ, which in truth is so rarely found. There will then be in this love, if it be right, these three qualities—good will, delight, and desire.

1st, Good will, earnest wishing, and, as we can, promoting God's glory, and stirring up others so to do. Those who seek more their own things than the things of Jesus Christ, more their own praise and esteem than His, are strangers to this Divine love; for she seeks not her own things.[175] The bitter root of self-love is most difficult to pluck up; this strongest and sweetest love of Christ alone does it actually though gradually. This love makes the soul, as the lower heaven, slow in its own motion, most swift in the motion of that first which wheels it about; so the higher degree of love, the more swift. It loves the hardest tasks and greatest difficulties, where it may perform God service, either in doing or in suffering for Him. *Love is strong as death, and many waters cannot quench it*.[176] The greater the task is, the more real is the testimony and expression of love, and therefore the more acceptable to God.

2dly, There is in true love a complacency and delight in God; a conformity to His will; loving what He loves, and studious of His will; ever seeking to know more clearly what it is that is most pleasing to Him, contracting a likeness to God in all His actions, by conversing with Him, by frequent contemplation of God, and looking on His beauty. As the eye lets in this affection, so it serves it constantly, and readily looks that way which love directs it. Thus the soul which is possessed with this love of Jesus Christ, has its eye much upon Him, thinks often on His former sufferings and present glory: the more it looks upon Christ, the more it loves; and still the more it loves, the more it delights to upon Him.

3dly, There is in true love a desire; for it is but small beginnings and tastes of His goodness which the soul has here; therefore it is still looking out and longing for the day of marriage. The time is sad and wearisome, and seems much longer than it is, while it is detained here. *I desire to depart*, says St. Paul, *and to be with Christ*.[177]

God is the sum of all things lovely. Thus excellent Gregory Nazianzen expresses himself, Orat. 1. "If I have any possessions, health, credit, learning, this is all the contentment I have of them, that I have somewhat I may despise for Christ, who is *totus desiderabilis, et totum desiderabile,*"—The all-desirable one, the everything desirable. And this love is the sum of all He requires of us; it is that which makes all our meaner services acceptable, and without which all we offer to Him is distasteful. God does deserve our love not only by His matchless excellence and beauty, but also by His matchless love to us, and that is the strongest loadstone of love. He has loved me, says the Apostle. How appears that? In no less than this, He has given Himself for me.[178] Certainly then, there is no clearer character of our love than this, to give ourselves to Him who has so loved us, and given Himself for us.

This affection must be bestowed somewhere: there is no man but has some prime choice, something that is the predominant delight of his soul; will it not then be our wisdom to make the worthiest choice? considering it is offered to us, it is extreme folly to reject it.

Grace does not pluck up by the roots and wholly destroy the natural passions of the mind, because they are distempered by sin; that were an extreme remedy to cure by killing, and heal by cutting off; no, but it corrects the distemper in them; it dries not up this main stream of love, but purifies it from the mud which it is full of in its wrong course, or turns it into its right channel, by which it may run into happiness, and empty itself into the ocean of goodness. The Holy Spirit turns the love of the soul towards God in Christ, for in that way only can it apprehend His love; so then Jesus Christ is the first object of this Divine love; He is *medium unionis*—the mean of union, through whom God conveys the sense of His love to the soul, and receives back its love to Himself.

And if we will consider His incomparable beauty, we may look on it in the Holy Scriptures, particularly in that divine song of loves, wherein Solomon borrows all the beauties of the creatures, dips his pencil in all their several excellencies, to set Him forth unto us, who is the chief of ten thousands. There is an inseparable intermixture of love with belief, and a pious affection receiving Divine truth; so that in effect, as we distinguish them, they are mutually strengthened, the one by the other, and so, though it seem a circle, it is a divine one, and falls not under the censure of the school's pedantry. If you ask, How shall I do to *love?* I answer, *Believe*. If you ask, How shall I *believe?* I answer, *Love*. Although the expressions to a carnal mind are altogether unsavory, by grossly mistaking them, yet, to a soul taught to read and hear them, by any measure of that same Spirit of love by which they were penned, they are full of heavenly and unutterable sweetness.

Many directions and means of begetting and increasing this love of Christ may be here offered; and those who delight in number may multiply them; but surely this one will comprise the greatest and best part, if not all of them,—Believe, and you shall love; believe much, and you shall love much; labor for strong and deep persuasions of the glorious things which are spoken of Christ, and this will command love. Certainly if men indeed believed His worth, they would accordingly love Him; for the reasonable creature cannot but affect that most which it firmly believes to be worthiest of affection. O! this mischievous unbelief is that which makes the heart cold and dead towards God. Seek then to believe Christ's excellence in Himself, and His love to us, and our interest in Him, and this will kindle such a fire in the heart, as will make it ascend in a sacrifice of love to Him.

Many signs likewise of this love may be multiplied, according to the many fruits and workings of it; but in them all, itself is its own most infallible evidence. When the soul finds that all its obedience and endeavor to keep the commands of Jesus Christ, which Himself makes its character, flows from love, then it is true and sincere: for do or suffer what you will, without love, all passes for nothing; all are ciphers without it, they signify nothing.[179]

This is the message of the Gospel, and that which the ministry aims at; and therefore the ministers ought to be suitors, not for themselves, but for Christ, to espouse souls to Him, and to bring in many hearts to love Him. And certainly, this is the most expeditious way to persuade to all other Christian duties, for this is to converse with Jesus Christ, and where His love is, no other incentive will be necessary; for love delights in the presence and conversation of the party loved. If we are to persuade to duties of the second table, the sum of those is, love to our brethren, resulting from the love of Christ, which diffuses such a sweetness into the soul, that it is all love, and meekness, and gentleness, and long-suffering.

If times be for suffering, love will make the soul not only bear, but welcome the bitterest afflictions of life, and the hardest kinds of death for His sake. In a word, there is in love a sweet constraint, or tying of the heart to all obedience and duty.

The love of God is requisite in ministers for their preaching of the word; so our Savior to St. Peter, *Simon, do you love me?—feed my lambs*.[180] It is requisite for the people that they receive the truth in the love of it, and that Christ preached may be entertained in the soul, and embraced by faith and love.

You who have chosen Christ for your love, let not your hearts slip out, to renew your customary base familiarity with sin; for that will bring new bitterness to your souls, and at least for some time will deprive you of the sensible favor of your beloved Jesus. Delight always in God, and give Him your whole heart; for He deserves it all, and is a satisfying good to it. The largest heart is all of it too strait for the riches of consolation which He brings with Him. Seek to increase in this love; though it is at first weak, yet labor to find it daily rise higher, and burn hotter and clearer, and consume the dross of earthly desires.

Receiving the end of your faith.] Although the soul that believes and loves, is put in present possession of God, as far as it is capable in its sojourning here, yet it desires a full enjoyment, which it cannot attain to without removing hence. *Whilst we are home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*.[181] with the Apostle. And because they are assured of that happy exchange, that being untied and freed of this body, they shall be present with the Lord, having His own word for it, that where He is, they shall be also;[182] this begets such an assured hope, as bears the name of *possession*. Therefore it is said here, *receiving the end of your faith*.

This receiving also flows from faith. Faith apprehends the present truth of the Divine promises, and so makes the things to come, present: and hope looks out to their after-accomplishment, which, if the promises be true, as faith avers, then hope has good reason firmly to expect. This desire and hope are the very wheels of the soul which carry it on, and faith is the common axis on which they rest.

In these words there are two things; I. The good hoped for in Christ, so believed on, and loved; I. The assuredness of the hope itself: yes, it is as sure as if it were already accomplished.

I. As for the good hoped for, it consists, 1. In the nature of it *viz.* the *salvation of their soul:* 2. In a relative property of it, *the end of their faith*.

1st, The nature of it is, *salvation, and salvation of the soul:* it signifies full deliverance from all kinds of misery, and the safe possession of perfect happiness, when the soul shall be out of the reach of all adversities, and adverse accidents, no longer subjected to those evils which are properly its own, namely, the consciousness of sin, and fear of wrath and sad defections; nor yet subject to those other evils which it endured by society with the body—outward distresses and afflictions, persecutions, poverty, diseases, &c.

It is called *salvation of the soul:* not excluding the body from the society of that glory, when it shall be raised and reunited to the soul: but because the soul is of itself an immortal substance, and both the more noble part of man, and the prime subject both of grace and glory, and because it arrives first at that blessedness, and for a time leaves the body in the dust to do homage to its original: therefore it is alone named here. But Jesus is the Savior of the body too, and He shall at His coming *change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body*.[183]

2dly, We have the relative property of this hope,—*The end of your faith*, the *end* or *reward;* for it is both. It is the *end*, either at which faith aims, or wherein it ceaseth. It is the *reward*, not of their works, nor of faith, as a work deserving it; but as the condition of the new covenant, which God, according to the tenor of that covenant, first works in His own, and then rewards as if it were their work—and this salvation, or fruition of Christ, is the proper reward of faith, which believes in Him unseen, and so obtains that happy sight. It is the proper work of faith to believe what you see not, and the reward of faith to see what you have believed.

II. This is the certainty of their hope, that it is as if they had already received it. If the promise of God and the merit of Christ hold good, then those who believe in Him, and love Him, are made sure of salvation. The promises of God in Christ are not yes and no, but they are in Him yes, and in Him Amen.[184] Sooner may the rivers run backward, and the course of the heavens change, and the frame of nature be dissolved, than can any soul that is united to Jesus Christ by faith and love, be severed from Him, and so fall short of the salvation hoped for in Him: and this is the matter of their rejoicing.

You rejoice with joy unspeakable.] *The natural man,* says the Apostle, *receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him;* and he adds the reason why he cannot know them, *because they are spiritually discerned*.[185] He has none of that faculty by which they are discerned. There is a vast disproportion between those things and nature's highest capacity; it cannot work beyond its sphere. Speak to the natural man of the matter of spiritual grief, the sense of guiltiness, and the apprehension of God's displeasure, or the hiding of His favor and the light of His countenance from the soul; these things stir not him, he knows not what they mean. Speak to him again of the peace of conscience, and sense of God's love, and the joy that arises hence; he is no less a stranger to that. Mourn to him, and he laments not; pipe to him, and he dances not, as our Savior speaks.[186] But as it there follows (ver. 19), there is a wisdom in these things, though they seem folly and nonsense to the foolish world, and this *wisdom is justified of her children*.

Having said something already of the causes of this spiritual joy, which the Apostle here speaks of, it remains that we consider these two things; 1. How joy arises from these causes; 2. The excellence of this joy, as it is here expressed.

There is here a solid sufficient good, and the heart made sure of it, being partly put in present possession of it, and having a most certain hope of all the rest. And what more can be required to make it joyful? Jesus Christ, the treasure of all blessings, received and united to the soul, by faith, and love, and hope!

Is not Christ the light and joy of the nations? such a light as Abraham, at the distance of many ages, of more than two thousand years, yet saw by faith, and seeing, rejoiced. Besides this brightness, which makes light a joyful object, light is often in Scripture put for joy. Christ, this light, brings salvation with Him: He is the *Sun of Righteousness*, and there is *healing in his wings*.[187] *I bring you*, said the angel, *good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people*. And their song has in it the matter of that joy, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*.[188]

But to the end we may rejoice in Christ, we must find Him ours; otherwise, the more excellent He is the more cause has the heart to be sad, while it has no portion in Him. *My Spirit has rejoiced*, said the blessed Virgin, *in God my Savior*.[189]

Thus, having spoken of our communion with Christ, the Apostle adds, *These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full*.[190] Faith works this joy by uniting the soul to Christ, and applying His merits, and from that application arises the pardon of sin; and so that load of misery, which was the great cause of sorrow, is removed; and so soon as the soul finds itself lightened and unloaded of that burden which was sinking it to hell, it cannot choose but leap for joy, in the ease and refreshment it finds. Therefore that Psalm which David begins with the doctrine of the pardon of sin, he ends with an exhortation to rejoicing. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered*:[191] thus he begins; but he ends, *Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous: and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart*. St. Peter speaks to his hearers, of the remission of sins, Act 2:38 : and at ver. 41, it is added, They received his words gladly. And our Savior joins these two together, *Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you*.[192] Thus, good tidings of liberty to captives are proclaimed, and a notable change there is of their estate *that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*.[193] Think with what joy the long-imprisoned debtor, drowned in debt, receives a full discharge, and his liberty: or a condemned malefactor the news of his pardon, and this will somewhat resemble it, but yet fall far short of the joy that faith brings, by bringing Christ to the soul, and so forgiveness of sins in Him.

But this is not all. This believing soul is not only a debtor acquitted and set free, but enriched besides with a new and great estate; not only a pardoned malefactor, but withal highly preferred and advanced to honor, having a right, by the promises, *to the unsearchable riches of Christ*,[194] as the Apostle speaks, and is received into favor with God, and unto the dignity of sonship, taken from the dunghill, and set with princes.[195]

As there is joy from Faith, so also from Love. Though this is in itself the sweetest and most delightful passion of the soul, yet, as we foolishly misplace it, it proves often full of bitterness; but being set upon Jesus Christ, the only right and worthy object, it causes this unspeakable delight and rejoicing.

First, It is matter of joy to have bestowed our love so worthily; and though our Savior seems to withdraw Himself, and sometimes sadden the soul who loves Him, with absences, in regard of sense, yet even in those sad times, the soul delights to love Him, and there is a pleasure in the very pains it has in seeking after Him. And this it knows, that His mercies are everlasting, and that He cannot be long unkind, but will return and speak comfortably to it.

Secondly, Our love to Christ gives us assurance of His to us, so that we have not only chosen worthily, but shall not be frustrated and disappointed; and it assures us of His, not as following, but as preceding and causing ours; for our love to Jesus Christ is no other than the reflex of His on us. *Wine makes glad the heart*,[196] but *your love is better than wine, says the spouse*.[197] And having this persuasion, that He has loved us and washed us in His blood,[198] and forgets us not in our conflicts, that though He Himself is in His glory, yet that He intercedes for us there, and will bring us there, what condition can befall us so hard, but we may rejoice in it, and in them, so far as we are sure to arrive at that full salvation, and the fruition of Him who has purchased it?

Then there is the third cause of our rejoicing, *viz.* our *Hope*. Now hope is our anchor fixed within the veil[199] that stays us against all the storms that beat upon us in this troublesome sea that we are tossed upon. The soul which strongly believes and loves, may confidently hope to see what it believes, and to enjoy what it loves, and in that rejoice. It may say, whatever hazards, whether outward or inward, whatever afflictions and temptations I endure, yet this one thing puts me out of hazard, and in that I will rejoice, that the salvation of my soul depends not upon my own strength, but is in my Savior's hand: My life is hidden with Christ in God: and when He who is my life shall appear, I likewise shall appear with Him in glory.[200] The childish world is hunting shadows, and gaping and hoping after they know not what; but the believer can say, *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day*.[201] Now we have not only a right to these things, but nevertheless, there must be frequent consideration of them to work joy. The soul must often view them, and so rejoice. *My meditation of him shall be sweet, says David; I will be glad in the Lord*.[202] The godly, failing in this, deprive themselves much of that joy they might have; and they who are most in these sublime thoughts have the highest and truest joy.

The Apostle expresses the excellence of this joy by these two words, *Unspeakable*, and *Full of glory*.

That it is unspeakable, no wonder, seeing the matter of it is inconceivable; it is an infinite good. God reconciled in Jesus Christ, and testifying and sealing His love unto the soul, and giving assured hope of that blessed vision of eternity,—what is more unspeakable than this? And for the same reason it is glorious, or glorified joy, having the highest and most glorious object; for it derives all its excellence from thence.

Unspeakable.] The best worldly joys are easily spoken of; they may be expressed to the utmost, yes, usually more is spoken of them than they are indeed. Their name is beyond their worth; they are very seldom found, upon experience, equal to the opinion and expectation that men have of them. But this spiritual joy is above the report any can make of it: say what they can of it who are of happiest expression, yet when a man comes to know it in his own breast, he will say (as that queen said of Solomon's wisdom), *the half was not told me*.[203]

Again, earthly joys are inglorious; many of which men are ashamed of, and those that seem most plausible, yet are below the excellence of the soul, and cannot fill it; but the joys that arise from union with Christ, as they are most avowable, a man needs not blush to own them,—so they are truly contenting and satisfying, and that is their glory, and the reason why we may glory in them. *My soul shall make her boast in the Lord*, says David.[204]

For *Application* of all this. If these things were believed we should listen no more to the foolish prejudice that the world has taken up against religion, and wherewith Satan endeavors to possess men's hearts, that they may be scared from the ways of holiness; they think it a sour, melancholy life, which has nothing but sadness and mourning in it. But, to remove this prejudice,

Consider, 1. Religion does not bar the lawful delights that are taken in natural things, but teaches the moderate and regular use of them, which is far the sweeter; for things lawful in themselves, are sinful in their excess, and prove to be bitter in the end. And if in some cases it requires the forsaking of lawful enjoyments, as of pleasure, or profits, or honor, for God and for His glory, it is generous and more truly delightful to deny them for this reason, than to enjoy them. Men have done much this way for the love of their country, and by principle of moral virtue; but to lose any delight, or to suffer any hardship for that highest end—the glory of God, and by the strength of love to Him, is far more excellent, and truly pleasant.

2. Religion indeed banishes the delights and pleasures of sin, but it is to exchange them for this joy that unspeakably surpasses them. It calls men from sordid and base delights to those that are pure delights indeed: it calls to men, Drink no longer from the puddle—here are the crystal streams of a living fountain. There is a delight in the very despising of impure delights; as St. Augustine exclaims, *Quam suave est istis suavitatibus carere!*—How pleasant it is to want these pleasures! But for such a change, to have in their place such delights which, compared to the other, deserve not the name; to have such spiritual joy as shall end in eternal joy, it is a wonder that we all don't make hast to choose this joy—but it is indeed because we believe it not.

3. It is true, the godly are subject to great distresses and afflictions; but their joy is not extinguished by them, no, nor diminished either, but often sensibly increased. When they have least of the world's joy, they abound most in spiritual consolations, and then relish them best. They find them sweetest, when their taste is not depraved with earthly enjoyments. We rejoice in tribulation,[205] says St. Paul: and here our Apostle insists on that, to verify the substance of this joy in the midst of the greatest afflictions.

4. Spiritual grief, which seems most opposite to this spiritual joy, excludes it not, for there is a secret delight and sweetness in the tears of repentance, a balm in them that refreshes the soul; and even their saddest kind of mourning, *viz.* the dark times of desertion, has this in it, which is someway sweet, that those mournings after their Beloved, who absents Himself, are a mark of their love to Him, and a true evidence of it. And then all these spiritual sorrows of whatever nature, are turned into spiritual joy; that is the proper end of them; they have a natural tendency that way.

5. But the natural man still doubts of this joy we speak of; because he sees and hears so little of it from them who profess to have it, and seem to have the best right to it. If we consider the wretchedness of this life, and especially the abundance of sin that is in the world, what wonder though this their joy retire much inward, and appear little abroad, where all things are so contrary to it, and so few are capable of it, to whom it were pertinent to vent it? Again, we see here, it is unspeakable; it were a poor thing if he who has it could tell it all out. *Pauperis est numerare* pecus—He is a poor man who counts his cattle. And when the soul has most of it, then it remains most within itself, and is so inwardly taken up with it, that possibly it can then least of all express it. It is with joys, as they say of cares and griefs, *Leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent*—Small ones speak, great ones are silent. The deepest waters run stillest. *Res severa est verum gaudium*, says Seneca. *True joy is a solid, weighty thing*, dwelling more in the heart than in the countenance: whereas, on the contrary, base and false joys are but superficial, skin-deep (as we say); they are all in the face.

Think not that it is with the godly, as the Prophet says of the wicked, that *there is no peace*[206] to them. The Septuagint reads it, *no joy;* certainly it is true there is no true joy to the wicked: they may revel and make a noise, but they rejoice not; *As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool*;[207] a great noise but little heat, and soon at an end. There is no continuing feast, but that of a *good conscience*. Wickedness and real joy cannot dwell together, as the very moralist Seneca has it often, and at large. But he who can say, The righteousness of Jesus Christ is mine, and in Him the favor of God, and the hope of eternal happiness, has such a light as can shine in the darkest dungeon, yea, in the dark *valley of the shadow of death* itself.[208]

Say not, if I commit myself to the way of godliness, I must bid farewell to gladness, never another merry day; no, on the contrary, never a truly joyful day till then, yes, no days at all, but night to the soul, until it receives Jesus Christ and His kingdom, which consists in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. You do not sacrifice Isaac, which signifies laughter (as St. Bernard has it), but a ram; not your joy, but filthy sinful delights which end in sorrow.

Oh! seek to know in your experience what those joys mean; for all describing and commending them to you will not make you understand them; but *taste and see that the Lord is good*;[209] *Lauda mellis dulcedinem quantum potes, qui non gastaverit, non intelliget,* says Augustine—Praise the sweetness of honey to the utmost, he who has never tasted it, cannot understand it. You cannot see and know this goodness, but by tasting it; and having tasted it, all those poor joys you thought sweet before, will then be bitter and distasteful to you.

And you who have Christ yours by believing, know your happiness, and rejoice, and glory in it. Whatever your outward condition, *Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice; for light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.*[210]

1Pe 1:10-12

Ver. 10. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come to you:

11. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

12. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported to you by those who have preached the Gospel to you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

It is the ignorance, or at least the inconsideration of Divine things, that makes earthly things, whether good or evil, appear great in our eyes; therefore the Apostle's great aim is, by representing the certainty and excellence of the belief and hope of Christians to his afflicted brethren, to strengthen their minds against all discouragements and oppositions; that they may account nothing too hard to do or suffer for so high a cause and so happy an end. It is the low and mean thoughts, and the shallow persuasion we have of things that are spiritual, that is the cause of all our remissness and coldness in them. The doctrine of salvation, mentioned in the former verse, as the end of our Christian faith, is illustrated in these words, from its antiquity, dignity, and infallible truth.

It is no modern invention; for the Prophets inquired after it, and foretold it in former ages from the beginning. Thus the prejudice of novelty is removed, which usually meets the most ancient truth in its new discoveries.

Again, it is no mean thing that such men as were of unquestioned eminence in wisdom and holiness, did so much study and search after, and having found it out, were careful not only to publish it in their own times, but to record it to posterity; and this, not by the private motion of their own spirits, but by the acting and guidance of the Spirit of God; which likewise sets the truth of their testimony above a doubtfulness and uncertainty.

But taking the three verses entirely together, we have in them these three things, testifying how excellent the doctrine of the Gospel is. I. We have the principal Author of it. II. The matter of it. III. The worth of those who are exercised about it, *viz.* the best of men, the Prophets, and Apostles, in administering it, and the best of all the creatures, the Angels, in admiring it.

I. The first Author is the absolutely *first*, the Spirit of God in the Prophets, ver. 11, in the Apostles, ver. 12. But the Spirit of Christ, in ver. 11, is the same Spirit that He sent down on His disciples after His ascension to glory, and which spoke in His Prophets before His descent to the earth. It is the Spirit of Christ, proceeding jointly from Him with the Father, as He is the Son of God, and dwelling most richly and fully in Him as the Son of man.

The Holy Ghost is in Himself holiness, and the source and worker of holiness, and Author of this holy doctrine, which breathes nothing but holiness, and urges it most pressingly upon all who receive it.

This is the very life of Divine faith, touching the mysteries of salvation, firmly to believe the revelation by the Spirit of God. This the word itself testifies, as we see; and it is really manifest in it; it carries the lively stamp of Divine inspiration, but there must be a spiritual eye to discern it. He who is blind, doesn't know that the sun shines at noon, except by the report of others; but those who see, are assured that they see it, and assured by none other than its own light. To ask one who is a true believer, How know you the Scriptures to be Divine? is the same as to ask him, How know you light to be light?

The soul is nothing but darkness and blindness within, until that same Spirit who shines outwardly in the word, shines likewise within it, and effectually makes it light; but once that is done, then the word is read with some measure of the same Spirit by which it was written, and the soul is assured that it is Divine; as in bodily sight, there must be a meeting of inward light, *viz.* the visual spirits with the outward object.

The Spirit of God within, brings evidence with it, and makes itself discernible in the word; all arguments, all books and study cannot attain to this. *It is given to believe*.[211]

No man knows the things of a man but the spirit of man.[212] But how holds that here? For if a man speak out the things that are in his spirit, then others may know them; but the Apostle's aim there, is to conclude that the things of God, even such as were revealed in His word, could not be known but by His own Spirit; so that though revealed, yet they remain still unrevealed till the Spirit teach within, as well as without; because they are intelligible by none but by those who are the private scholars and hearers of the Holy Ghost, the Author of them; and because there are so few of these, therefore there is so little real believing amidst all the noise and profession that we make of it. Who is there (if you will believe them) who believes not? And yet truly there is too much cause to continue the Prophet's regret, *Who has believed our report?*[213]

Learn then to suspect yourselves, and to discover your own unbelief, that you may desire this Spirit to teach you inwardly those great mysteries that outwardly reveals and teaches by His word. Make use of that promise, and press the Lord with it, *They shall be all taught of God.*[214]

But, II. There is here the *matter* of this doctrine, which we have in three several expressions. 1. That which is repeated from the foregoing verse; it the doctrine of Salvation, that is the end of it. 2. The doctrine of the sufferings and glory of Christ, as the means. And, 3. The doctrine of grace, the spring of both.

1. It is the doctrine of Salvation, the only true doctrine of true happiness, which the wisest of natural men have groped and sought after with much earnestness, but with no success; they had nothing but the dark moonlight of nature, and that is not sufficient to find it out; only the Sun of Righteousness shining in the sphere of the Gospel, has brought life and immortality to light.[215] No wonder that natural wisdom, the deepest of it, is far from finding out the true method and way of cure, seeing it cannot discover the disease of miserable mankind, *viz.* the sinful and wretched condition of nature by the first disobedience.

Salvation expresses not only that which is negative, but implies likewise positive and perfect happiness; thus forgiveness of sins is put for the whole nature of Justification frequently in Scripture. It is more easy to say of this unspeakable happiness, what it is not, than what it is. There is in it a full and final freedom from all annoyance; all tears are wiped away, and their fountain is dried up; all feeling and fear, or danger of any the least evil, either of sin or punishment, is banished forever; there are no invasions of enemies, no robbing or destroying in all this holy mountain, no voice of complaining in the streets of the new Jerusalem. Here it is at the best but interchanges of mornings of joy, with sad evenings of weeping; but there, there shall be no light, no need of sun nor moon; *For the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*:[216]

Well may the Apostle (as he does here throughout this chapter) lay this salvation to counterbalance all sorrows and persecutions, and whatever hardships can be in the way to it. The soul that is persuaded of this, in the midst of storms and tempests enjoys a calm, triumphs in disgraces, grows richer by all its losses, and by death itself attains this immortal life.

Happy are those who have their eyes fixed upon this salvation, and are longing and waiting for it; who see so much of that brightness and glory that it darkens all the luster of earthly things to them, and makes them trample upon those things which formerly they admired and doted on with the rest of the foolish world. Those things we account so much of, are but as rotten wood, or glow-worms that shine only in the night of our ignorance and vanity: as soon as the light-beam of this salvation enters into the soul, it cannot much esteem or affect anything below it; and if those glances of it which shine in the word, and in the soul of a Christian, be so bright and powerful, what then shall the full sight and real possession of it be?

2. The Gospel is represented as the doctrine of the sufferings and glory of Christ, as the means of salvation. The worker of this salvation, whom the prophets and Apostles make the sum of all their doctrine, is Jesus Christ, and the sum of that work of redemption (as we have it here), is His humiliation and exaltation; His sufferings and the glory that followed thereupon. Now, although this serves as an encouragement to Christians in their sufferings, that this is the way by which their Lord went into His glory, and is true also of Christ mystical, the head with the members, as the Scriptures often teach us, yet I think it is here mainly intended as a summary of the work of our redemption by Jesus Christ, relating to the salvation mentioned ver. 10, and as the cause for the effect, so it is put for it here. The Prophets inquired, and prophesied of that salvation. How? By searching out and foretelling the sufferings, and glory of Christ. His sufferings, then, and His after-glories are our salvation. His suffering is the purchase of our salvation, and His glory is our assurance of it; He, as our head, having triumphed, and being crowned, makes us likewise sure of victory and triumph. His having entered on the possession of glory makes our hope certain. This is His prayer, that where He is, there we may be also:[217] and this is His own assertion, *The glory which you gave me I have given them*.[218] This is His promise, *Because I live, you shall live also*.[219] Christ and the believer are one; this is that *great mystery* the Apostle speaks of.[220] Though it is a commonly known truth, the words and outside of it obvious to all, yet none can understand it but those who indeed partake of it. By virtue of that union, their sins were accounted His, and Christ's sufferings are accounted theirs; and by consequence, His glory, the outcome of His sufferings, is likewise theirs. There is an indissoluble connection between the life of Christ and of a believer. *Our life is hidden with Christ in God;* and therefore, while we remain there, our life is there, though hidden, and *when Christ who is our life shall appear, we likewise shall appear with him in glory*.[221] Considering that the sufferings and glory of our Redeemer are the main subject of the Gospel, and the causes of our salvation, and of our comfortable persuasion of it, it is a wonder that they are not more the matter of our thoughts. Shouldn't we daily consider the bitterness of that cup of wrath He drank for us, and be wrought to repentance and hatred of sin, to have sin embittered to us by that consideration, and find the sweetness of His love in that He did drink it, and by that, be deeply possessed with love to Him? These things we now and then speak of, but they sink not into our minds, as our Savior exhorts, where He is speaking of those same sufferings. O! that they were engraved on our hearts, and that sin were crucified in us, and the world crucified to us, and we unto the world, by the cross of Christ![222]

And then considering the glory where He is, to have our eye often upon that, and our hearts solacing and refreshing themselves frequently with the thoughts of that place, and condition where Christ is, and where our hopes are, before long, to behold Him; both to see His glory, and to be glorified with Him; is it not reason? Yes, it is necessary, it cannot be otherwise, if our treasure, and Head be there, that our hearts be there likewise.[223]

The third expression here of the Gospel is, That it is the Doctrine of Grace. The work of redemption itself and the several parts of it, and the doctrine revealing it, have all the name of Grace; because they all flow from Free Grace; that is their spring and first cause.

And it is this wherein the doctrine of salvation is mainly comfortable, that it is free: *By grace are you saved.*[224] It is true, God requires faith, it is *through faith:* but He that requires that, gives it too; *That not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*.[225] It is wonderful grace to save upon believing; believe in Jesus for salvation, and live accordingly, and it is done; there is no more required to your pardon, but that you receive it by faith. But truly nature cannot do this; it is as impossible for us of ourselves to believe, as to do. This then is that which makes it all grace from beginning to end, at God not only saves upon believing, but gives believing itself. Christ is called not only the *Author and Finisher* of our salvation, but even of *our faith*.[226]

Free Grace being rightly apprehended, is that which stays the heart in all estates, and keeps it from fainting even in its saddest times. What though there is nothing in myself but matter of sorrow and discomfort? it cannot be otherwise; it is not from myself that I look for comfort at any time, but from my God and His free grace. Here is comfort enough for all times; when I am at the best, I ought not, I dare not, rely upon myself; when I am at the worst, I may, and should rely upon Christ, and His sufficient grace. Though I be the vilest sinner that ever came to Him, yet I know that He is more gracious than I am sinful; yea, the more my sin is, the more glory will it be to His grace to pardon it; it will appear the richer. Does not David argue thus; *For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity; for it is great?*[227] But it is an empty fruitless notion of grace, to consider it only in the general, and in a wandering way: we are to look upon it particularly, as addressed to us; and it is not enough that it comes to us, in the message of him that brings it only to our ear, but, that we may know what it is, it must come into us; then it is ours indeed. But if it comes to us in the message only, and we send it away again, if it shall so depart, we had better never have heard of it; it will leave a guiltiness behind it, that shall make all our sins weigh much heavier than before.

Inquire whether you have entertained this grace or not; whether it has come to you, and into you, or not; whether the *kingdom of God is within you*, as our Savior speaks.[228] It is the most woeful condition that can be, not to be far from the kingdom of God, and yet to fall short, and miss of it. The grace of God revealed in the Gospel is entreating you daily to receive it, is willing to become yours, if you reject it not. Were your eyes open to behold the beauty and excellence of this grace, there would be no need to deliberate; yea, you would endure none. Desire your eyes to be opened, and enlightened from above, so that you may know it, and your hearts opened, that you may be happy by receiving it.

The Apostle, speaking of Jesus Christ as the foundation of our faith, calls Him *the same yesterday, today, and forever.*[229] *Yesterday*, under the Law,—*today*, in those primitive times nearest His incarnation,—and *forever*, in all succeeding ages. And the resemblance holds good between the two cherubim over the mercy-seat, and the two testaments: *those* had their faces toward one another, and both toward the mercy-seat; and *these* look to one another in their doctrine, agreeing perfectly, and both look to Christ, the true mercy-seat; and the great Subject of the Scriptures. Thus we see here, the things which the Prophets foretold as to come, and the Apostles reported were accomplished, were the same, and from the same Spirit; they were the sufferings of Christ, and His after-glory, and in them, our salvation by free grace. The prophecies look forward to the times of the Gospel; and the things then fulfilled look back to the prophecies; and each confirms the other, meeting all in Christ, who is their truth and centre.

We have spoken already of the Author and Subject of this salvation. Now we come to say something,

III. Concerning the worth of those who are employed about it, as well in administering to it, as in admiring it. And these are the Prophets and the Apostles: the first foretold what was to come; the second preached them when they came to pass.

In the Prophets, there are three things here remarked. 1. Their diligence. 2. The success of it. 3. The extent of its usefulness.

1. This their diligence disparages not their extraordinary visions and revelations, and that which is added, that the Spirit of Christ was in them, and did foretell the things to come.

It was their constant duty, and they being sensible of their duty, made it their constant exercise, to search into Divine mysteries by meditation and prayer; yea, and by reading such holy writers, as were already extant in their times, as Dan 9:2; Dan 10:11. For which cause, some, taking the word actively, conceive Daniel to be called there a *man of desires*, because of his great desire, and diligent search after the knowledge of those high things. And in this diligent way they constantly waited for those revelations, which sometimes, when it seemed good to the Spirit of God, were imparted to them.

"Prophecy resides not (say the Hebrew doctors) but in a man who is great in wisdom and virtue, whose affections overcome him not in any worldly things, but by his knowledge he overcomes his affections continually: on such a man the Holy Spirit comes down, and his soul is associated to the angels, and he is changed to another man." Thus Maimonides.

It was the way of the prince of darkness amongst the idolatrous Gentiles, to speak either through senseless statues, or, where he uttered his oracles by such profane prophets as he had, to cause them in a fury to tumble forth words that they understood not, and knew not what they said. But the Spirit of God, being *Light*, and the holy Prophets inspired with it, they being diligent attendants on its motions, and searchers of the mysteries of salvation, understood well what their business was, and to what purpose those things of the kingdom of Christ tended which they by inspiration did foretell; and therefore bent their thoughts this way, praying, and searching, and waiting for answers, studying to keep the passage, as it were, open for the beams of those Divine revelations to come in at; not to have their spirits clogged and stopped with earthly and sinful affections, endeavoring for that calm and quiet composure of spirit, in which the voice of God's Spirit might be the better heard. See Psa 85:8, and Hab 2:1; in both which places follows an excellent prophecy concerning Christ, and the salvation that He wrought for His people.

Were the Prophets not exempted from the pains of search and inquiry, who had the Spirit of God not only in a high measure, but after a singular manner? How unbecoming, then, are slothfulness and idleness in us! Whether is it, that we judge ourselves advantaged with more of the Spirit than those holy men, or that we esteem the doctrine and mysteries of salvation, on which they bestowed so much of their labor, unworthy of ours? These are both so gross, that we shall be loath to own either of them; and yet, our laziness and negligence in searching after these things, seem to charge us with some such thoughts as one of those.

You will say, This concerns those who succeed to the work of the Prophets and Apostles in ordinary,—the ministers of the Gospel. And it does indeed fall first upon them. It is their task indeed to be diligent, and as the Apostle exhorts his Timothy, to *give attendance to reading*,[230] but, above all, to study to have much experimental knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ, and for this end, to disentangle and free themselves, as much as is possible, from lower things to the search of heavenly mysteries.[231] As they are called *angels*, so they ought to be, as much as they can attain to it, in a constant nearness unto God, and attendance on Him, like the angels, and to look much into these things as the angels here are said to do; to endeavor to have their souls purified from the affections of sin, that the light of Divine truth may shine clear in them, and not be fogged and misted with filthy vapors; to have the impressions of God clearly written in their breasts, not mixed and blurred with earthly characters; seasoning all their readings and common way of studies with much prayer, and Divine meditation. Those who converse most with the king, and are inward with him, know most of the affairs of state, and even the secrets of them, which are hidden from others: and certainly those of God's messengers who are most often with Himself, cannot but understand their business best, and know most of His meaning, and the affairs of His kingdom; and to that end it is confessed, that singular diligence is required in them. But seeing the Lord has said without exception, that *The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him*,[232] and that He will reveal Himself and His saving truths to those who humbly seek them; do not any of you yourselves so much injury, as to bar yourselves from sharing in your measure of the search of these same things, which were the study of the Prophets, and which by their study and publishing them, are made the more accessible and easy to us. Consider that they concern us universally, if we would be saved; for it is salvation here that they studied. *Search the Scriptures*, says our Savior,[233] and that is the motive, if there can be any that may be thought in reason pressing enough, or if we do indeed think so, *For in them you think you have eternal life*. And it is there to be found: Christ is this *salvation* and that *eternal life*. And He adds further, *They are they* (these Scriptures) *which testify of me.* These are the only golden mines in which the abiding treasures of eternity are to be found, and therefore worthy of all the digging and pains we can bestow on them.

Besides their industry in this inquiry and search, there are here expressed their ardent affection to the thing they prophesied of and their longings and wishes for its accomplishment, *viz.* the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, the top of all their desires, the great Hope and the Light of Israel. No wonder they desired His day, who had so much joy in the seeing it so far off, as over the head almost of two thousand years. Faith overlooking them, and foreseeing it so in Abraham, his heart danced for joy. *Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad*.[234]

And this is conceived to be the meaning of those expressions in that mystical song, as they suit those times of the Jewish Church, breathing out her longings for the coming of her beloved. His speaking by the Prophets was His voice as afar off; but His incarnation was His coming near, and kissing Church *with the kisses of his mouth*.[235] And to omit other expressions throughout the song, the last chapter, ver. 1, is tender and pathetical, *O! that you were as my brother,* &c.; and the last words of it, *Make haste, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices*. And when this salvation came in the fullness of time; we see how joyfully good old Simeon embraces it, and thought he had seen enough, and therefore upon the sight desired to have his eyes closed: *Now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation*.[236] Therefore our Savior says to His Apostles, *Blessed are your eyes, for they see: for many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them*.[237] This is He, whom we disesteem and make so small account of, being now so clearly revealed; whom they studied, and sought, and wished so much for, so many ages before.

2ndly. The success of their search is remarked; in seeking they found the certainty, and the time of His coming; they sought out till they found, and then they prophesied of that salvation and grace; *they searched what*, and *what manner of time*, and the Spirit manifestly foretold it to them.

They sought to know *what manner of time* it should come to pass, *viz.* in a time of great distress, and bad estate of the people, as all the Prophets testify: and particularly that place[238] gives an express character of the time; though there be some diversity of exposition of the particular words, yet the main sense is agreed on by all sound interpreters, and the Chaldee paraphrase has it expressly, that that Shiloh is the Messiah.

And of His sufferings and after-glories they prophesied very clearly, as Psa 22:1-31; Isa 53:1-12, &c. And our Savior Himself makes use of their testimony in both these points.[239]

3rdly. There is the benefit of their search and finding, in the extent of it, verse 12, to the believers in the Apostles' times, and to the succeeding Christian Church, and so to us in these days; but in some peculiar sense the Prophets ministered to the people of those times in which Christ suffered and entered into glory, because they were the first who enjoyed the accomplishment of those prophecies, having been fulfilled in their own days.

The Prophets knew well that the things they prophesied were not to be fulfilled in their own times, and therefore in their prophesying concerning them, though both themselves and the people of God who were contemporary with them reaped the comfort of that doctrine, and were by faith partakers of the same salvation, and so it was to themselves as well as to us, yet concerning the accomplishment, they knew it was not to themselves, it was not to be brought to pass in their days; and therefore, speaking of the glory of Christ's kingdom, they often foretell it for *the latter days*, as their phrase is. And as we have the things they prophesied of, so we have this peculiar benefit of their prophecies, that their suiting so perfectly with the event and performance, serves much to confirm our Christian faith.

There is a foolish and miserable way of verifying this; men ministering the doctrine of salvation to others and not to themselves; carrying it all in their heads and tongues, and none of it in their hearts; not hearing it even while they preach it; reaching the bread of life to others, and eating none of it themselves. And this, the Apostle says, that he was most careful to avoid, and therefore dealt severely with his body, that it might not in this way endanger his soul. *I keep under my body,* says he, *and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*.[240] It is not in this sense that the Prophets ministered to others, and not to themselves. No; they had joy and comfort in the very hopes of the Redeemer to come, and in the belief of the things that any others had spoken, and which they themselves spoke concerning Him. And thus the true preachers of the Gospel, although their ministerial gifts are for the use of others, yet that salvation which they preach, they lay hold on, and partake of themselves; as your boxes where perfumes are kept for garments and other uses, are themselves perfumed by keeping them.

We see how the Prophets ministered it as the great and never-failing consolation of the Church in those days, in all their distresses. It is wonderful when they are foretelling either the sorrows and afflictions, or the temporal restoration and deliverances of the Jews, what sudden outbursts they will make to speak of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and the days of the Gospel, insomuch that he who considers not the Spirit they were moved by, would think it were incoherence and impertinency; but they knew well what they meant, that those news were never unseasonable, nor beside the purpose: that the sweetness of those thoughts, *viz.* the consideration of the Messiah, was able (to such as believed) to allay the bitterest distresses, and that the great deliverance He was to work, was the top and sum of all deliverances. Thus their prophecies of Him were present comfort to themselves and other believers then: and further, were to serve for a clear evidence of the Divine truth of those mysteries in the days of the Gospel, in and after their fulfillment.

This sweet stream of their doctrine did, as the rivers, make its own banks fertile and pleasant as it ran by, and flowed still forward to after-ages, and by the confluence of more such prophecies, grew greater as it went, till it fell in with the main current of the Gospel in the New Testament, both acted and preached by the Great Prophet Himself, whom they foretold as to come, and recorded by His Apostles and Evangelists, and thus united into one river, clear as crystal. This doctrine of salvation in the Scriptures has still refreshed the city of God, His Church under the Gospel, and still shall do so, till it empties itself into the ocean of eternity.

The first discovery we have of this stream nearest its source, the eternal purpose of Divine mercy, is in that promise which the Lord Himself preached in few words to our first parents, who had recently made themselves and their race miserable: The seed of the woman shall break the head of the serpent.[241]

The agreement of the predictions of the Prophets with the things themselves, and the preaching of the Apostles following, (the other kind of men employed in this salvation,) make up one organ, or great instrument, tuned by the same hand, and sounding by the same breath of the Spirit of God; and that is expressed here as the common authority of the doctrine in both, and the cause of their harmony and agreement in it.

All these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, the calling of Prophets and Apostles and Evangelists, and the ordinary ministry of the Gospel by Pastors and Teachers, tend to that great design which God has in building His Church, in making up that great assembly of all the elect, to enjoy and praise Him for all eternity.[242] For this purpose He sent His Son out of His bosom, and for this purpose He sends forth His messengers to reveal that salvation which His Son has wrought, and sends down His Spirit upon them, that they may be fitted for so high a service. Those cherubim wonder how guilty man escapes their flaming swords, and re-enters paradise. The angels see that their companions who fell are not restored, but behold their place filled up with the spirits of just men, and they envy it not: *Which mystery the angels desire to look into;* and this is added in the close of these words for the extolling of it.

The angels look upon what they have seen already fulfilled, with delight and admiration; what remains, namely, the full accomplishment of this great work in the end of time, they look upon with desire to see it finished: it is not a slight glance they take of it, but they fix their eyes and look steadfastly on it, *viz*. that mystery of godliness, *God manifest in the flesh;* and it is added, *seen of angels*.[243]

The Word made flesh, draws the eyes of those glorious spirits, and possesses them with wonder to see the Almighty Godhead joined with the weakness of a man, yea, of an infant. He who stretches forth the Heavens, bound up in swaddling clothes! And to surpass all the wonders of His life, this is beyond all admiration, that the Lord of Life was subject to death, and that His love to rebellious mankind moved Him both to take on and lay down that life.

It is not surprising that angels admire these things, and delight to look upon them; but it is strange that we do not do so. They view them steadfastly, and we neglect them: either we consider them not at all, or give them but a passing look, half an eye. That which was the great business of the Prophets and Apostles, both for their own times, and to convey them to us, we regard not, and turn our eyes to foolish wandering thoughts, which angels are ashamed at. They are not so concerned in this great mystery as we are; they are but mere beholders, compared to us; yea, they seem rather to be losers some way, in that our nature, in itself inferior to theirs, is in Jesus Christ exalted above theirs.[244] We bow down to the earth, and study, and grovel in it, rake into the very bowels of it, and satisfy ourselves with the outside of *the unsearchable riches of Christ,*[245] and look not within it; but they, having no will nor desire but for the glory of God, being pure flames of fire burning only in love to Him, are no less delighted than amazed with the bottomless wonders of His wisdom and goodness, shining in the work of our redemption.

It is our shame and folly, that we lose ourselves and our thoughts in poor childish things, and trifle away our days we know not how, and let these rich mysteries lie ignored. They look up on the Deity in itself with continual admiration; but that they look down to this mystery is another wonder. We give them an ear in public, and in a cold formal way stop conscience's mouth with some religious performances in private, and no more; to have deep and frequent thoughts, and to be ravished in the meditation of our Lord Jesus, once on the cross, and now in glory,—how few of us are acquainted with this!

We see here excellent company, and examples not only of the best of men that have been,—we have them for fellow-servants and fellow-students,—but if that can persuade us, we may all study the same lesson with the very angels, and have the same thoughts with them. This the soul does, which often entertains itself with the delightful admiration of Jesus Christ, and the redemption He has wrought for us.

H1Pe 1:13

Ver. 13. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The great error of man's mind, and the cause of all his errors of life, is the diverting of the soul from God, and turning downward to inferior confidences and comforts; and this wrong choice is the very root of all our miseries: therefore the main purpose of the holy Word of God is to untie the hearts of men from the world, and reduce them to God as their only rest and solid comfort; and this is here the Apostle's mark at which all the preceding discourse aims; it all meets and terminates in this exhortation, *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind*.

In the words are these *three* things, 1. The great support and comfort of the soul, which the Apostle repeats, and represents to his afflicted brethren. 2. His exciting them to the right apprehension and confident expectation of it. 3. The inference of that exhortation.

I. The great matter of their comfort is, *The grace which is to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ*. Some for grace read joy: [. . .] the words are not more near one to another, than the things they signify, *grace* and *joy;* but it is most commonly thus read.

The estate of grace and that of glory, are not only so inseparably connected, but so like one to the other; yea, so essentially the same, that the same expressions in Scripture often suit both of them; and so suit them, that it is doubtful for which of the two to understand them: but the hazard is not great, seeing they are so near, and so one, grace being glory begun, and glory grace completed, both often called the kingdom of God. So the *grace* here said to be *brought to them*, is either the Doctrine of grace in the Gospel, in which Jesus Christ is revealed, and that grace in Him; (for the whole tenor of the covenant of grace, every clause of it, holds in Him; His precious name runs through it all;) or it is the Grace of salvation which is to be fully perfected at the last and clearest revelation of Jesus Christ. And for this rather I take it here, because the Apostle's nearest preceding words were concerning that, and it is set up here as the object of hope, which though often put for faith, yet, in its proper notion, looks out to that which is to come.

This is the last act of Grace, and yet still it is called by its own name, and not turned into the name of merit, notwithstanding all the obedience and all the sufferings of the saints that have gone before it; yea, *even the salvation to be revealed* to them, is called Grace. But it is needless to insist on this, for certainly none who partake of grace, will be of another mind, or ever admit the mixture of the least notion of self-deserving.

Though much dispute has been bestowed on this, and questions have been multiplying in the disputants' hands (as is usual in controversies), one growing out of another, yet truly I think the debate in this matter to be but waste; it is not only against the voice of the Scriptures, and of grace itself in the soul, but even against sound reason, to imagine any meriting, properly taken, in any mere creature at His Creator's hands, who has given him his being; of which gift all his services and obedience fall short, so that he can never come to be upon even disengaged terms, much less to oblige anew, and deserve somewhat further. Besides, that same grace by which any one serves and obeys God, is likewise His own gift, as it is said, *All things come of you, and of your own have we given you*.[246] Both the ability and the will of giving to Him, are from Him; so that in these respects, not angels, nor man in innocency, could properly merit at the hands of God, much less man lost, redeemed again, and so coming under the new obligation of infinite mercy. And this is so evident a truth, that the most learned and most ingenious Jesuits and schoolmen have, in various passages of their writings, acknowledged it, that there cannot be any compensation, and much less merit from the creature to God, but only in relation to His own free purpose, and the tenor of His word and covenant, which is inviolable, because He is unchangeable, and truth itself.

His first grace He gives freely, and no less freely the increases of it, and with the same gracious hand sets the crown of glory upon all the grace that He has given before. It is but the following forth of His own work, and fulfilling His own thoughts of free love, which love has no cause but in Himself, and finds none worthy, but gives them all the worthiness they have, and accepts of their love, not as worthy in itself to be accepted, but because He Himself has wrought it in them. Not only the first tastes, but the full draught of the waters of life is freely given;[247] nothing is brought with them but thirst.

That is to be brought.] Not *that is brought*, or, that *shall be brought,* but if we will render it strictly, it is, *that is a bringing to you*. That blessedness, that consummation of grace the saints are hastening forward to, walking on in their way, wherever it lies, indifferently, *by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report*.[248] And as they are hastening to it, it is hastening to them in the course of time; every day brings it nearer to them than before; and notwithstanding all difficulties and dangers in the way, those who have their eye and hopes upon it, shall arrive at it, and it shall be brought safely to their hand; all the malice of men and devils shall not be able to cut them short of this grace that is a bringing to them against the day of the *revelation of Jesus Christ*.

At the revelation of Jesus Christ.] This is repeated from the 7th verse. And it is a day of revelation, a revelation of the righteous judgment of God.[249] And thus it would be to all, were it not that it is withal the *revelation of Jesus Christ;* therefore is it a day of grace, all light and blessedness to those who are in Him, because they shall appear in Him, and if He be glorious, they shall not be inglorious and ashamed. Indeed, were our secret sins then to be set before our own eyes, in their most frightening aspect, and to be set open to the view of angels and men, and to the eye of Divine justice, and we left alone so revealed, who is there that could gather any comfort, and would not rather have their thoughts filled with horror at the remembrance and expectation of that day? And thus indeed all unbelieving and ungodly men may look upon it, and find it terrible; but to those who are shadowed under the robe of righteous Jesus, yea, who are made one with Him, and shall partake of His glory in His appearing, it is the sweetest, the most comfortable thought that their souls can be entertained and possessed with, to remember this glorious revelation of their Redeemer.

It is their great grief here, not that they are hated and vilified, but that their Lord Jesus is so little known, and therefore so much despised in the world. He is veiled and hidden from the world. Many nations don't acknowledge Him at all; and many of those that confess Him in word, deny Him in deed. Many that have a form of godliness, do not only lack, but mock and scoff at the power of it; and to such Christ is not known, His excellencies are hid from their eyes. Now this glory of their Lord being tender [precious] to those who love Him, they rejoice much in the consideration of this, that there is a day at hand, when He shall appear in His brightness and full of glory to all nations, and all shall be forced to acknowledge Him; it shall be without doubt, and unquestioned to all, that He is the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Judge of the world.

And as it is the day of His revelation, it is also the revelation of all the adopted sons of God in Him.[250] They are now considered the refuse of the world, exposed to all kinds of contempt; but then the beams of Christ's glory shall beautify them, and they shall be known for His.[251]

Next, there is, II. The exhortation, by which the Apostle excites them to the right apprehension and confident expectation of this grace—*Hope to the end.* The difference between these two graces, faith and hope, is so small, that the one is often taken for the other in Scripture; it is but a different aspect of the same confidence; faith laying hold of the infallible truth of those Divine promises, of which hope does assuredly expect the accomplishment, and that is their truth; so that this immediately results from the other. This is the anchor fixed within the veil, which keeps the soul firm against all the tossings on these swelling seas, and the winds and tempests that arise upon them. The firmest thing in this inferior world is a believing soul.

Faith establishes the heart on Jesus Christ, and hope lifts it up, being on that rock, above intervening dangers, crosses, and temptations, and sees the glory and happiness that follow after them.

To the end.] Or, perfectly: and therefore the Christian seeks most earnestly, and yet waits most patiently.[252] Indeed, this hope is perfect in continuity; it is *a hope unto the end*, because it is perfect in its nature, although imperfect in degree. Sometimes doubtings are intermixed with it in the souls of Christians, yet this is their infirmity, as the Psalmist speaks,[253] not the infirmity and insufficiency of the object of their hope. Worldly hopes are in their own nature imperfect; they imply, in their very being, doubtfulness and wavering, because the things on which they are built are inconstant and uncertain, and full of deceit and disappointments. How can that hope be immovable, which is built upon moving sands or quagmire? That which is itself unfixed cannot give stability to any other thing resting upon it; but because the truth and goodness of the immutable God are the foundation of spiritual hope, therefore it is assured, and *as Mount Zion which cannot be removed:*[254] and this is its perfection.

Now the Apostle exhorts his brethren to endeavor to have their hearts possessed with as high a measure and degree of this hope, as may be; seeing in itself it is so perfect and firm, such an assured hope; that they aspire to all the assurance and perfection of it they can attain. This exercise of hope, as I conceive, is not only to have the habit of it strong in the soul, but to act it often, to be often turning that way, to view that approaching day of liberty: *Lift up your heads; for your redemption draws nigh*.[255] Where this hope is often acted on, it will grow strong, as all habits do; and where it is strong, it will work much, and delight to act often, and will control both the doubtings and the other many impertinent thoughts of the mind, and force them to yield the place to it. Certainly those who long much for the coming of Christ, will often look out to it. We are usually hoping after other things, which only offer themselves to draw us after them, and to scorn us. What are the breasts of most of us, but so many nests of foolish hopes and fears intermixed, which entertain us day and night, and steal away our precious hours from us, that might be laid out so gainfully upon the wise and sweet thoughts of eternity, and upon the blessed and assured hope of the coming of our beloved Savior!

The other words of exhortation here used, are subservient to this end, that this hope may be the more perfect and firm; a similar exhortation is much after the same manner joined by our Savior[256] with the expectation and waiting for His coming; and in this posture the Israelites, eating the passover, were expecting their deliverance: so we our full and final freedom.

If you would have much of this, call off your affections from other things, that they may be capable of much of it. The same eye cannot both look up to Heaven and down to earth at the same time. The more your affections are trussed up and disentangled from the world, the more unencumbered and active will they be in this hope: the more sober they are, the less will they fill themselves with the coarse delights of earth, the more room will there be in them, and the more they shall be filled with this hope. It is great folly in our spiritual warfare to charge ourselves superfluously. All fullness of one thing hinders the receiving and admittance of another, especially of things so opposite as these fullnesses are. *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit*,[257] says the Apostle. *That* is a brutish fullness; makes a man no man; *this* Divine fullness makes him more than a man; it were happy to be so filled with this, as that it might be called a kind of drunkenness, as it was with the Apostles.[258]

Be sober.] Or *watch*. The same word means both, and with good reason; for you know the unsober cannot watch. Now, though one main part of sobriety, and that which more properly and particularly bears this name, *viz.* temperance in meat and drink, is here intended; and though against the opposite of this, not only the purity and spirituality of religion, but even moral virtue inveighs as its special enemy, yea, nature itself; and those who only naturally consider the body, and its interest of life and health, find reason enough to cry down this base intemperance, which is so hateful by its own deformity, and besides, carries its punishment along with it; although, I say, this sobriety is indeed most necessary for the preservation of grace and of the spiritual temper of the soul, and is here intended, yet, I conceive, it is not all that is here meant; the word is more general, for the moderate and sober use of all things worldly. As the Apostle says, *Gird up the loins of your mind*, so it is to be understood, let your *minds* be sober, all your affections inwardly adapted to your spiritual condition, not glutting yourselves with fleshly and perishing delights of any kind; for the more you take in of these, the less you shall have of spiritual comfort and of this perfect hope. Those who pour out themselves upon present delights, don't look like strangers, and hopeful expectants of another life and better pleasures.

And certainly, the Captain of our salvation will not own them for His followers, who lie down to drink of these waters, but only such as in passing take of them with their hand. As excessive eating or drinking makes the body both sick and lazy, suitable for nothing but sleep, and besots the mind, as it clogs up with filthy crudities the ways through which the Spirit should pass, encumbers them, and makes them move heavily, as a coach in a deep way—thus does all immoderate use of the world and its delights wrong the soul in its spiritual condition, making it sickly and feeble, full of spiritual distempers and inactivity, benumbing the graces of the Spirit, and filling the soul with sleepy vapors, making it grow secure and heavy in spiritual exercises, and obstructing the way and motion of the Spirit of God in the soul. Therefore, if you would be spiritual, healthful, and vigorous, and enjoy much of the consolations of Heaven, be sparing and sober in those of the earth, and what you lessen of the one, shall be certainly made up in the other. Health, with a good constitution of body, is a more constant, remaining pleasure, than that of excess and a momentary pleasing of the palate: thus the comfort of this hope is a more refined and more abiding contentment than any that is in the passing enjoyments of this world; and it is a foolish bargain to exchange a drachma of the one for many pounds of the other. Consider how pressingly the Apostle St. Paul reasons: *And every man who strives for the mastery is temperate in all things*.[259] And take besides, our Savior's exhortation: Be sober and watch, *for you know not what hour your Lord does come*.[260]

A double-minded man, says St. James, *is unstable in all his ways*.[261] Although the word usually denotes deceitfulness and dissimulation of mind,—answering to the Hebrew phrase, *a heart and a heart*,—yet here I think it has another sense, agreeable to the Apostle's present discourse, and it implies doubtfulness and unsettled wavering of mind.

It is impossible that the course of life can be anything other than uneven and disordered, if the spring of it, *the heart,* whence *are the issues of life*,[262] be so. A man that is not agreed within, not of one mind with himself, although there was nothing to trouble or alter him from without, that inward commotion is a sufficient principle and cause of inconsistency. How much more then must he waver, when he is assaulted, and beat upon by outward oppositions! He is like the waves of the sea,[263] of himself ever fluctuating to and fro, according to the natural instability of that element, and at the same time exposed to the tossings of all the waves that arise.

It is, therefore, in religion, a main thing to have the heart established and fixed in the belief and hope of the great things we look for: this will produce strength of resolution, and consistency in action, and in suffering, too. And this is here our Apostle's great intention, to ballast the souls of his brethren with this firm belief, that they might sail even and steady in those seas of trouble. Why, says he, if these things we have spoken be so, if there is indeed truth in them, and you believe it so, what remains then, but to resolve for it upon any terms, to fit out for the journey, whatever be the difficulties, and in them all to keep up the soul by that certain hope that will not disappoint us?

What he has said before, is, as it were, showing them some fruits, some clusters of grapes, of that promised land; and this exhortation is answerable to Caleb's words, seeing it so good a land, *Let us go up at once, and possess it.* Though there be fleshly objects, *sons of Anak*,[264] giants of temptations, and afflictions, and sins to be overcome, before it becomes ours, yet it is well worth all our labor, and our God has assured us of the victory, and given us, by His own word, undoubted hope of possessing it.

That which he principally exhorts to in this verse, is the right placing and firm continuing of our hope. When we consider how much of our life is taken up this way, in hoping for things we don't have, and that even those who have most of what others are desiring and pursuing, are still hoping for something more; that when men have attained one thing, though it be something they promised themselves to rest contented with, yet presently upon obtaining it, hope begins to find out some new matter for itself; I say, considering the incessant working of this passion throughout our life, it is of very much concern for us to give it a right object, and not still to be living in vanity and uncertainty. Here is, then, *that* for our hope to apply itself to, after which it doesn't need to change, nor can change without the greatest loss. *Hope to the end, for the grace that is coming at the revelation of Jesus Christ;* bestow all your hope on this and recall it not. Hope perfectly, and to the end.

The other part of the exhortation relates to this as the main end, and in the original runs in this form: *Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, being sober, hope.* And so that hope may be the more perfect and endure to the end, and be more like itself, *i.e.* heavenly, your minds must be freed from the earth, that they may set for Heaven. And this is expressed in two different words, but both meaning much the same thing: that temper of sobriety and that posture of being girded, are no other than the same removal of earthly-mindedness and encumbering cares and desires of earthly things.

Gird up the loins.] The custom of those countries was, that wearing long garments, they trussed them up for work or a journey. Chastity is indeed a Christian grace, and a great part of the soul's freedom and spirituality, and fits it much for divine things, yet I think it is not so particularly and only intended in this expression, as St. Jerome and others take it; for though the girding of the loins seemed to them to favor that sense, it is only an allusion to the manner of girding up which was then used; and besides, the Apostle here makes it clear that he meant something else; for he says, *The loins of your minds*. Gather up your affections so that they don't hang down to hinder you in your race, and so, in your hopes of obtaining; and do not only gather them up, but tie them up, so that they don't fall down again, or if they do, be sure to gird them tighter than before. Thus be still as men prepared for a journey, tending to another place. This is not our home, nor the place of our rest: therefore our loins must be still girded up, our affections kept from training and dragging down upon the earth.

Men who are altogether earthly and profane, are so far from girding up the loins of their mind, that they set them wholly downwards. The very highest part of their soul is glued to the earth, and they are daily partakers of the serpent's curse: they go on their belly and eat the dust; they *mind earthly things*.[265] Now this disposition is inconsistent with grace; but those who are in some measure truly godly, though they grovel not like that, yet may be somewhat guilty of allowing their affections to fall too low, that is, to be too much conversant with vanity, and further engaged than is suitable, to some things that are worldly; and by this means abate of their heavenly hopes, and make them less perfect, less clear and sensible to their souls.

And because they are most subject to take this liberty in the fair and calm weather of prosperity, God often, and wisely and mercifully, causes rough blasts of affliction to arise upon them, to make them gather their loose garments nearer to them, and gird them closer.

Let us then remember our way, and where we are, and keep our garments girded up, for we walk amidst thorns and briars which, if we let them down, will entangle and stop us, and possibly tear our garments. We walk through a world where there is much mire of sinful pollutions, and therefore it cannot but defile them; and the crowd we are among will be ready to tread on them, yea, our own feet may be entangled in them, and so make us stumble, and possibly fall. Our only safest way is to gird up our affections wholly.

This perfect hope is enforced by the whole strain of it; for well may we fix our hope on that happiness to which we are appointed in the eternal election of God, ver. 2, and born to it by our new birth, ver. 3, 4, and preserved to it by His Almighty power, ver. 5, and cannot be cut short of it by all the afflictions and oppositions in the way; no, nor so much as deprived by them of our present joy and comfort in the assurance of it, ver. 6, 7, 8, 9. And then being taught the greatness and excellence of that blessed salvation, by the doctrine of the Prophets and Apostles, and the admiration of Angels, all these conspire to confirm our hope, to make it perfect and persevering to the end.

And we may also learn by the foregoing doctrine that this is the place of our trial and conflict, but the place of our rest is above. We must here have our loins girded, but when we come there, we may wear our long white robes at their full length without disturbance, for there is nothing there but peace; and without danger of defilement, for no unclean thing is there; yea, the streets of that new Jerusalem are paved with pure gold. To Him, then, who has prepared that city for us, let us ever give praise.

1Pe 1:14-16

Ver. 14. As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

Ver. 15. But as he who has called you is holy, so you be holy in all manner of conversation;

Ver. 16. Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy.

Your word is a lamp unto my feet, says David, *and a light unto my path;*[266] not only comfortable, as light is to the eyes, but with direction, as a lamp to his feet. Thus here the Apostle not only furnishes consolation against distress, but exhorts and directs his brethren in the way of holiness, without which the apprehension and feeling of those comforts cannot subsist.

This is none other than a clearer and fuller expression, and further pressing of that sobriety and spirituality of mind and life, which he jointly exhorted to, with that duty of perfect hope, ver. 13, as inseparably connected with it. If you would enjoy this hope, be not conformed to the lusts of your former ignorance, but *be holy*.

There is no doctrine in the world either so pleasant or so pure as that of Christianity: it is matchless, both in sweetness and holiness. The faith and hope of a Christian have in them an abiding precious balm of comfort; but this is never to be so lavished away, as to be poured into the puddle of an impure conscience; no, that were to lose it unworthily. As many as have this hope purify themselves, *even as he is pure*.[267] Here they are commanded to be *holy as he is holy.* Faith first purifies the heart,[268] empties it of the love of sin, and then fills it with the consolation of Christ and the hope of glory.

It is a foolish ungrounded fear, and such as argues inexperience of the nature and workings of Divine Grace, to imagine that the assured hope of salvation will beget unholiness and presumptuous boldness in sin, and that therefore the doctrine of that assurance is a doctrine of licentiousness. Our Apostle, we see, is not so sharp-sighted as these men think themselves; he sees no such matter, but indeed supposes the contrary as unquestionable; he takes not assured hope and holiness as enemies, but joins them as nearest friends; *hope perfectly* and *be holy*.

They are mutually strengthened and increased each by the other. The more assurance of salvation, the more holiness, the more delight in it, and study of it as the only way to that end. And as labor is most pleasant when we are made surest it shall not be lost, nothing does make the soul so nimble and active in obedience as this *oil of gladness*,[269] this assured hope of glory. Again, the more holiness there is in the soul, the clearer always is this assurance; as we see the face of the heavens best when there are fewest clouds. The greatest affliction does not damp this hope so much as the smallest sin; yea, it may be the more lively and sensible to the soul by affliction; but by sin it always suffers loss, as the experience of all Christians does certainly teach them.

The Apostle exhorts to obedience, and enforces it by a most persuasive reason. His exhortation is, 1. Negative: *Not fashioning yourselves*. 2. Positive: *Be you holy*.

1. For the negative part of the exhortation. That from which he would remove and separate them is *Lusts:* this is in Scripture the usual name of all the irregular and sinful desires of the heart, both the polluted habits of them and their corrupt streams, both as they are within, and as they outwardly vent themselves in the lives of men. The Apostle St. John calls it the lust of the world,[270] and love of the world,[271] and then branches it into those three, which are, indeed, the base anti-trinity that the world worships, *The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*.[272]

The soul of man unconverted is nothing but a den of impure lusts, wherein dwell pride, uncleanness, avarice, malice, &c., just as Babylon is described, Rev 18:2, or as Isa 13:21. Were a man's eyes opened, he would as much abhor to remain with himself in that condition as to dwell in a house full of snakes and serpents, as St. Austin says. And the first part of conversion is at once to rid the soul of these annoying inhabitants; for there is no one at all found naturally vacant and free from them. Thus the Apostle here expresses of the believers to whom he wrote, that these lusts were theirs before, *in their ignorance*.

There is a truth implied in it, *viz.* that all sin arises from some kind of ignorance, or, at least, from present inadvertence and inconsideration, turning away the mind from the light; which, therefore, for the time, is as if it were not, and is all one with ignorance in the effect, and therefore the works of sin are all called *works of darkness*;[273] for were the true visage of sin seen by a full light, undressed and unpainted, it were impossible, while it so appeared, that any one soul could be in love with it; it would rather flee from it, as hideous and abominable. But because the soul unrenewed is all darkness, therefore it is all lust and love of sin; there is no order in it, because no light. As at the first, in the world, confusion and darkness went together, and *darkness was upon the face of the deep*,[274] it is so in the soul; the more ignorance, the more abundance of lusts.

That light which frees the soul, and rescues it from the very kingdom of darkness, must be somewhat beyond that which nature can attain to. All the light of philosophy, natural and moral, is not sufficient, yea, the very knowledge of the law, severed from Christ, serves not so to enlighten and renew the soul, as to free it from the darkness or ignorance here spoken of; for our Apostle writes to Jews who knew the law, and were instructed in it before their conversion, yet he calls those times, wherein Christ was unknown to them, the *times of their ignorance*. Though the stars shine never so bright, and the moon with them in its full, yet they do not altogether make it day; still it is night until the sun appears. Therefore the Hebrew doctors, upon that word of Solomon's, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*,[275] say, *Vana etiam lex, donec venerit Messias*—Vain even the law, until Messiah come. Therefore of Him Zacharias says, *The day-spring from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*.[276]

A natural man may attain to very much acquired knowledge of the doctrine of Christ, and may discourse excellently of it, and yet still his soul be in the chains of darkness, fast locked up under the ignorance here mentioned, and so he may be still of a carnal mind, in subjection to these lusts of ignorance.

The saving light of faith is a beam of the Sun of Righteousness Himself, that He sends into the soul, by which He makes it discern His incomparable beauties, and by that sight alienates it from all those lusts and desires, which do then appear to be what indeed they are, vileness and filthiness itself; makes the soul wonder at itself, how it could love such base trash so long, and so fully resolves it now on the choice of Jesus Christ, *the chiefest among ten thousand*,[277] yea, the fairest of the children of men,[278] for that He is withal the only-begotten Son of God, the *brightness of his* (Father's) *glory, and the express image of his person*.[279]

The soul once acquainted with Him, can, with disdain, turn off all the base solicitations and importunities of sin, and command them away that formerly had command over it, though they plead former familiarities, and the interest they once had in the heart of the Christian before it was enlightened and renewed. He can well tell them, after his sight of Christ, that it is true; while he knew no better pleasures than they were, he thought them lovely and pleasing, but that one glance of the face of Jesus Christ has turned them all into extreme blackness and deformity; that as soon as Christ appeared to him, they immediately lost all their credit and esteem in his heart, and have lost it forever; they need never look to recover it any more.

And it is by this that the Apostle enforces this warning. It is true, that the lusts and vanities that are in request in the world were so with you, but it was when you were blind, they were the lusts of your ignorance; but now you know how ill they will suit with the light of that Gospel which you profess, and that inward light of faith which is in the souls of those who are really believers.

Therefore, since you have renounced them, keep them still at that distance; not only never admit them more to lodge within you; that surely you cannot do; but do not so much as for custom's sake, and in compliance with the world about you, outwardly conform yourselves to any of them, or make semblance to partake of them: as St. Paul says, *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*;[280] reprove them by your carriage, and let the light of your holy lives reveal their foulness.

2. We have the positive part of the Apostle's exhortation, *Be holy*. This includes the former, the renouncing of the lusts and pollutions of the world, both in heart and life; and adds further, the filling of their room, being cast out, with the beautifying graces of the Spirit of God, and the acting of those graces in their whole conversation, both in private and abroad; in conversing with themselves, and conversing with others, whether good or bad, in a constant, even course, still like themselves, and like Him who has called them: for it is a most unseemly and unpleasant thing to see a man's life full of ups and downs, one step like a Christian and another like a worldling; it cannot choose but both pain himself, and mar the edification of others.

But as he who has called you is holy.] Consider whose you are, and you cannot deny that it becomes you to be holy. Consider your near relation to the holy God: this is expressed two ways, namely, *As children*, and *As he who has called you;* which is the same as if he had said, has begotten you again. The very outward vocation of those who profess Christ, presses holiness upon them, but the inward vocation far more. You were running to destruction in the way of sin, and there was a voice which, together with the Gospel preached to your ear, spoke into your heart, and called you back from that path of death to the way of holiness, which is the only way of life. He has severed you from the mass of the profane world, and picked you out to be jewels for Himself. He has set you apart for this purpose, that you may be *holy to Him* (as the Hebrew word, which signifies *holiness*, imports setting apart, or fitting for a peculiar use); be not then untrue to His design. *God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness*;[281] therefore *be holy*. It is sacrilege for you to dispose of yourselves after the impure manner of the world, and to apply yourselves to any profane use, whom God has consecrated to Himself.

As children.] This is, no doubt, relative to that which he spoke, verse 3, by way of thanksgiving; and that *Wherefore*, in the 13th verse, draws it down here by way of exhortation. Since you are, by a spiritual and new birth, the children of such a great and good Father, who commands you to holiness, be obedient children, in being holy; and since He Himself is most holy, be like Him as His children: *Be holy, as he is holy*.

As obedient children.] Opposed to that expression, *children of disobedience* or *unbelief*,[282] as the word may be rendered, and that is always the spring of disobedience; sons of mispersuasibleness, who will not be drawn and persuaded by the tenderest mercies of God. Now, though this Hebrew manner of speech, children of obedience or disobedience, signifies no more than obedient or disobedient persons, yet it signifies them most emphatically, and means a high degree of obedience or disobedience; these *children of disobedience* (verse 2) are likewise *children of wrath* (verse 3).

Of all children, the children of God are the most obliged to obedience, for He is both the wisest and the most loving of Fathers. And the sum of all His commands is that which is their glory and happiness, that they endeavor to be like Him, to resemble their heavenly Father. *Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect,* says our Savior;[283] and here the Apostle is citing out of the Law: *You shall be holy; for I am holy*.[284] Law and Gospel agree in this. And as children who resemble their fathers, as they grow up in years, they grow the more like them; thus the children of God increase in their resemblance, and are daily more and more renewed after His image. There is in them an innate likeness by reason of His image impressed on them in their first renovation, and His Spirit dwelling within them; and there is a continual increase of it, by their pious imitation and study of conformity, which is here exhorted to.

The imitation of vicious men and the corrupt world is here forbidden. The imitation of men's indifferent customs is base and servile; the imitation of the virtues of good men is commendable; but the imitation of this highest pattern, this primitive goodness, the most holy God, is the top of excellence. It is well said, *Summa religionis est imitari quem colis*.[285] All of us offer Him some kind of worship, but few seriously study and endeavor this blessed conformity.

There is unquestionably, among those who profess themselves the people of God, a select number who are indeed His children, and bear His image both in their hearts and in their lives; this impression of holiness is on their souls and their conversation; but with the most, a name and a form of godliness are all they have for religion. Alas! we speak of holiness, and we hear of it, and it may be we commend it, but we don't act holy; or if we do, it is but an acting of it, in the sense in which the word is often taken for a personated acting, as on a stage in the sight of men; not as in the sight of our lovely God, lodging it in our hearts, and from there diffusing it into all our actions. A child is then truly like his father, when not only his appearance resembles him, but still more so, his mind and inward disposition; thus the true children of God are like their heavenly Father in their words and in their actions, but most of all in heart.

It doesn't matter if the profane world (which so hates God that it cannot endure His image) mocks and reviles; it is your honor to be, as David said,[286] thus *more vile*, in growing still more like Him in holiness. So what if the polite man considers your fashion a little odd and too precise? it is because he knows nothing above that model of goodness which he has set himself, and therefore approves of nothing beyond it: he doesn't know God, and therefore does not discern and esteem what is most like Him. When courtiers come down into the country, the common homebred people possibly think their habit strange; but they care not for that, it is the fashion at court. What need then that the godly should be so tender-foreheaded, as to be put out of countenance because the world looks on holiness as a singularity? it is the only fashion in the highest court, yea, of the King of kings Himself.

For I am holy.] As it will raise our endeavor high, to look on the highest pattern, so it will lay our thoughts low concerning ourselves. Men compare themselves with men, and readily with the worst, and flatter themselves with that comparative betterness. This is not the way to see our spots, to look into the muddy streams of profane men's lives; but look into the clear fountain of the word, and there we may both discern and wash them. Consider the infinite holiness of God, and this will humble us to the dust. When Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord, and heard the Seraphim cry, *Holy, holy, holy,* he cried out of his own and the people's unholiness, *Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts*. (Chap. 6:3, 5.)

1Pe 1:17

Ver. 17. And if you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

The temptations that meet a Christian in the world, to turn him aside from the straight way of obedience and holiness, are either such as present the hope of some apparent good, to draw him from that way, or the fear of some evil, to drive and frighten him from it: and therefore the word of God is much in strengthening the Christian mind against these two; and it does it mainly, by possessing it both with hopes and fears of a higher nature, that do by far weigh down the other.

The most frequent assaults of temptation are upon these two passions of the mind: therefore they are chiefly to be fortified and defended by a hope and fear opposite to those that do assault us, and sufficiently strong to resist and repel them. These two, therefore, our Apostle here urges:

1. The *hope* of that glory which the Gospel propounds, and so outbids all the proffers of the world, both in the greatness and the certainty of its promises. 2. The *fear* of God, the greatest and most just Judge, alone worthy to be feared and reverenced; the highest anger and enmity of all the world being less than nothing, in comparison of His smallest displeasure. We have here,

I. This fear. II. The reason enforcing it. III. The term or continuance of it.

I. The fear itself, *In fear*. But how does this square with the high discourse that went before, of perfect assured hope, of faith, and love, and joy, yea, joy unspeakable and glorious, arising out of these? How have all those excellences fallen, as it were, into a dungeon, when fear is mentioned after them! Doesn't the Apostle St. John say, that *perfect love casts out fear*?[287] And is it not more clearly opposite to perfect or assured hope, and to faith and joy?

If you understand it correctly, this is such a fear as does not prejudice, but preserves those other graces, and the comfort and joy that arise from them: and they all agree so well with it, that they are naturally helps to each other. It would be superfluous to insist on defining this passion of fear, and the many distinctions of it, either with philosophers or divines. The fear here recommended is, out of question, a holy self-suspicion and fear of offending God, which may not only consist with assured hope of salvation, and with faith, and love, and spiritual joy, but is their inseparable companion; as all divine graces are linked together (as the heathens said of their three graces), and, as they dwell together, they grow or decrease together. The more a Christian believes, and loves, and rejoices in the love of God, certainly the more unwilling he is to displease Him, and if in danger of displeasing Him, the more afraid of it; and, on the other side, this fear being the true principle of a wary and holy conversation, fleeing sin, and the occasions of sin, and temptations to it, and resisting them when they make an assault, is as a watch or guard that keeps out the enemies and disturbers of the soul, and so preserves its inward peace, keeps the assurance of faith and hope unmolested, and the joy that they cause, and the communion and societies of love between the soul and her beloved, uninterrupted; all that are then most in danger when this fear abates and falls to slumbering; for then, some notable sin or other is ready to break in and put all into disorder, and for a time make those graces, and the comfort of them to present feeling, as much to seek as if they were not there at all.

No wonder, then, that the Apostle, having stirred up his Christian brethren, whatever be their estate in the world, to seek to be rich in those jewels of faith, and hope, and love, and spiritual joy, and then considering that they travel amongst a world of thieves and robbers,—no wonder, I say, that he adds this, advises them to give those their jewels in custody, under God, to this trusty and watchful grace of godly fear; and having earnestly exhorted them to holiness, he is very fitly particular in this fear, which makes up so great a part of that holiness, that it is often in Scripture named for it all.

Solomon calls it the *beginning* (or the top) *of knowledge:*[288] the word signifies both, and it is both. The beginning of it is the beginning of wisdom, and the progress and increase of it, is the increase of wisdom. That hardy rashness which many consider valor is the companion of ignorance; and of all rashness, boldness to sin is the most witless and foolish. There is in this, as in all fear, an apprehension of an evil of which we are in danger. The evil is sin, and the displeasure of God and punishment following upon sin. The godly man judges wisely, as the truth is, that sin is the greatest of evils, and the cause of all other evils; it is a transgression of the just law of God, and so a provocation of His just anger, and the cause of those punishments, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, which He inflicts. And then, considering how mighty He is to punish, considering both the power and the reach of His hand, that it is both most heavy and unavoidable; all these things may and should concur to the working of this fear.

There is, no doubt, a great difference between those two kinds of fear that are usually differentiated by the names of servile and filial fear; but certainly, the most genuine fear of the sons of God, who call Him Father, does not exclude the consideration of His justice and of the punishment of sin which His justice inflicts. We see here, it is used as the great motive of this fear, that He judges every man according to his works. And David, in that Psalm in which he so much breathes forth those other sweet affections of love, and hope, and delight in God and in His word, yet expresses this fear even of the justice of God: *My flesh trembles for fear of you; and I am afraid of your judgments*.[289] The flesh is to be awed by Divine judgments, though the higher and surer part of the soul is strongly and freely tied with the cords of love. Temporal corrections, indeed, they fear not so much in themselves, as that impression of wrath that may be upon them for their sins.[290] That is the main matter of their fear, because their happiness is in His love, and the light of His countenance, that is their life. They regard not how the world looks upon them; they care not who frown, as long as He smiles on them; because no other enemy nor evil in the world can deprive them of this but their own sin, therefore that is what they fear most.

As the evil is great, so the Christian has great reason to fear in regard of his danger of it, considering the multitude, strength, and craft of his enemies, and his own weakness and lack of skill to resist them. And his sad experience in being often foiled, teaches him that it is so; he cannot be ignorant of it; he finds how often his own resolutions and purposes deceive him. Certainly, a godly man is sometimes driven to wonder at his own frailty and inconsistency. What strange differences will be between him and himself! how high and how delightful at some times are his thoughts of God and the glory of the life to come; and yet, how easily at another time base temptations will soil him, or, at the least, molest and vex him! And this keeps him in a continual fear, and that fear in continual vigilance and circumspection. When he looks up to God, and considers the truth of His promises, and the sufficiency of His grace and protection, and the almighty strength of his Redeemer, these things fill his soul with confidence and assurance; but when he turns his eye downward again upon himself, and finds so much remaining corruption within, and so many temptations, and dangers, and adversaries without, this forces him not only to fear, but to despair of himself; and it should do so, that his trust in God may be the purer and more entire. That confidence in God will not make him secure and presumptuous in himself, nor that fear of himself make him diffident of God. This fear is not opposite to faith, but high-mindedness and presumption are.[291] To a natural man, it would seem an odd kind of reasoning that of the Apostle: *It is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure:*[292] therefore (would he think) you may save labor, you may sit still, and not work, or, if you work, you may work fearlessly, being so sure of His help: but the Apostle is of another mind; his inference is, therefore, *work out your own salvation*, and work it *with fear and trembling*.[293]

But he who has assurance of salvation, why should he fear? If there is truth in his assurance, nothing can disappoint him, not sin itself. It is true; but it is no less true, that if he isn't afraid to sin, there is no truth in his assurance: it is not the assurance of faith, but the mispersuasion of a secure and profane mind. Suppose that it's true, that the sins of a godly man cannot be such as to cut him short of that salvation of which he is assured; yet they may be such that for a time will deprive him of that assurance, and not only remove the comfort he has in that, but let in horrors and anguish of conscience in its place. Though a believer is freed from hell, (and we may overstrain this assurance, in our doctrine, beyond what the most sober and devout men in the world can ever find in themselves, though they will not trouble themselves to contest and dispute with those who say they have it,) so that his soul cannot come there: yet some sins may bring as it were a hell into his soul for a time, and this is reason enough for any Christian in his right mind to be afraid of sin. No man would willingly risk a fall that may break his leg, or some other bone; though he could be made sure that he should not break his neck, or that his life were not at all in danger, and that he should be perfectly cured, yet, the pain and trouble of such a hurt would scare him, and make him wary and fearful when he walks in danger. The broken bones that David complains of after his fall[294] may work fear and wariness in those who hear him, even if they were assured of a similar recovery.

This fear is not cowardice: it does not debase, but elevates the mind; for it drowns all lower fears, and begets true fortitude and courage to encounter all dangers, for a good conscience and the obeying of God. *The righteous are bold as a lion*.[295] He dares do any thing but offend God; and to dare that is the greatest folly, and weakness, and baseness, in the world. From this fear have sprung all the generous resolutions and patient sufferings of the Saints and Martyrs of God; because they dare not sin against Him, therefore they dare be imprisoned, and impoverished, and tortured, and die for Him. Thus the Prophet sets carnal and godly fear as opposite, and the one expelling the other.[296] And our Savior, *Be not afraid of those who kill the body;—but fear him, who after he has killed has power to cast into hell; yea, I say to you, Fear him*.[297] Fear not, but fear; and therefore fear, that you may not fear. This fear is like the trembling that has been observed in some of great courage before battles. Moses was bold and fearless in dealing with a proud and wicked king, but when God appeared, he said, (as the Apostle informs us,) *I exceedingly fear and quake*.[298]

II. The reason we have here to persuade to this fear is twofold. 1. Their relation to God. 2. Their relation to the world.

1. To God as their Father, and as their Judge. Because you do call Him Father, and profess yourselves His children, *begotten again* by Him (for this verse looks back to that expression), it becomes you, as obedient children, to stand in awe, and fear to offend Him your Father; and a Father so full of goodness and tender love. But as He is the best Father, so consider that He is withal the greatest and most just Judge: He judges every man according to his work.

God always sees and discerns men, and all their works, and judges, that is, accounts of them, as they are, and sometimes in this life declares this His judgment of them to their own consciences, and in some to the view of others, in visible punishments and rewards; but the most solemn judgment of all is reserved to that great day which He has appointed, *in the which he will judge the world in righteousness*[299] by His Son Jesus.

There is here the sovereignty of this Judge, the universality of His Judgment, and the equity of it. All must answer at His great court; He is supreme Judge of the world. He made it and has therefore unquestionable right to judge it. He judges every man; and it is a most righteous judgment, which has these two in it: 1. An exact and perfect knowledge of all men's works; 2. Impartial judgment of them so known. This second is expressed negatively, by removing the crooked rule which man's judgment often follows; it is without consideration of those personal differences which men eye so much. And the first is according to the work itself. *He accepts not the persons of princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor;* and the reason is added, *For they all are the work of his hands*.[300] He made all the persons, and He makes all those differences Himself as it pleases Him; therefore He does not admire them as we do, no, nor at all regard them. We find very great odds between stately palaces and poor cottages, between a prince's robe and a beggar's cloak; but to God they are all one; all these petty differences vanish in comparison of His own greatness. Men are great and small, compared with one another; but they altogether amount to just nothing compared to Him. We find high mountains and low valleys on this earth; but compared with the vast compass of the heavens, it is all but as a point, and has no sensible greatness at all.

Nor does He regard any other differences to bias His judgment, from the works of men, to their persons. You profess the true religion, and call Him Father; but if you live devoid of His fear, and are disobedient children, He will not spare you because of that relation, but rather punish you the more severely. Because you pretended to be His children, and yet obeyed Him not, therefore you shall find Him your Judge, and an impartial Judge of your works. Remember, therefore, that your Father is this Judge, and fear to offend Him. But then, indeed, a believer may look back to the other comfort, who abuses it not to a sinful security. He resolves thus willingly: "I will not sin, because my Father is this just Judge: but for my frailties I will hope for mercy, because the Judge is my Father."

Their works.] This comprehends all actions and words, yea, thoughts; and each work entirely, taken outside and inside together: for He sees all alike, and judges according to all together. He looks on the wheels and paces within, as well as on the handle without, and therefore we ought to fear the least crookedness of our intentions in the best works; for if we entertain any such, and study not singleness of heart, this will cast all, though we pray and hear the word, and preach it, and live outwardly without blame. And in that great judgment, all secret things shall be revealed; as they are always open to the eye of this Judge, so He shall then open them before men and angels: therefore let the remembrance and frequent consideration of this All-seeing Judge, and of that great judgment, wean our hearts and beget in us this fear.[301] If you would have confidence in that day, and not fear it when it comes, fear it now, so as to avoid sin; for those who now tremble at it, shall then, when it comes, lift up their faces with joy; and those who will not fear it now shall then be overwhelmed with fears and terror; they shall have such a burden of fear then as that they shall account the hills and mountains lighter than it.

Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.] In this I think is implied another incentive of this fear, arising, 2. from their relation to this world. You are sojourners and strangers, (as here the word signifies,) and a wary, deportment carriage becomes strangers, because they are most exposed to wrongs, and hard accidents. Enemies and snares surround you; how can you be secure in the midst of them? This is not your rest; watchful fear becomes this your sojourning. Perfect peace and security are reserved for you at home, and that is the last term of this fear; it continues all the time of this sojourning life, dies not before us; we and it shall expire together.

III. This, then, is the term, or continuance of this fear.

Happy is the man who fears always, said Solomon,[302] in secret and in society, in his own house, and in God's. We must hear the word with fear, and preach it with fear, afraid to miscarry in our intentions and manners. *Serve the Lord with fear*, yea, in times of inward comfort and joy, yet *rejoice, with trembling*.[303] Not only when a man feels most his own weakness, but when he finds himself strongest. None are so high advanced in grace here below, as to be out of need of this grace: but when their sojourning shall be done, and they have come home to their Father's house above, then no more fearing. No entrance for dangers there, and therefore no fear. A holy reverence of the majesty of God they shall indeed have then most of all, as the angels still have, because they shall see Him most clearly, and because the more He is known the more He is reverenced; but this fear that relates to danger shall then vanish, for in that world there is neither sin, nor sorrow for sin, nor temptation to sin; no more conflicts, but after a full and final victory, an eternal peace, and everlasting triumph. Not only fear, but faith, and hope, do imply some imperfection not consistent with that blessed estate; and therefore all of them having obtained their end, shall end; faith in sight, hope in possession, and fear in perfect safety; and everlasting love and delight shall fill the whole soul in the vision of God.

1Pe 1:18-19

Ver. 18. Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

Ver. 19. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

It is impossible for a Christian to give himself to conform to the world's ungodliness, unless first he forgets who he is, and by what means he attained to be what he is. Therefore the Apostle, persuading his brethren to holiness, puts them in mind of this, as the strongest incentive. Not only have you the example of God set before you, as your Father, to beget in you the love of holiness, as being your liveliest resemblance of Him; and the justice of God as your Judge, to argue you into a pious fear of offending Him; but consider this, that He is your Redeemer; He has bought out your liberty from sin and the world, to be altogether His; and think on the price laid down in this ransom; and these out of question will prevail with you.

We have here, I. The evil dissuaded from, *viz. A vain conversation*. II. The dissuasion itself.

1. It is called *their vain conversation*. *2. Received by tradition from their fathers*. By this I think is to be understood, not only the superstitious and vain devices in religion, which abounded amongst the Jews by tradition, for which our Savior often reproved them while He was conversant among them, as we find in the Gospel; (and all this was meant, ver. 14, by *the lusts of their former ignorance;*) but generally, all the corrupt and sinful customs of their lives; for it seems not so pertinent to His purpose when exhorting to holiness of life, to speak of their superstitious traditions as of their other sinful habits, which are no less hereditary, and by the power of example, traditional: which because of their common root in man's sinful nature, pass so easily from parents to children, nature making their example powerful, and the corruption of nature giving it most power in that which is evil. And this is the rather mentioned to take away the force of it, and cut off that influence which it might have had in their minds. There is a kind of conduct that the authority of your father pleads for; but remember, that it is that very thing from which you are delivered, and called to a new state and form of life, and have a new pattern set before you, instead of that corrupt example.

It is one great error, not only in religion and manners, but even in human science, that men are ready to take things upon trust, unexamined, from those who went before them, partly out of easiness and sparing the pains of trial, partly out of a superstitious over-esteem of their authority; but the chief reason why corruptions in religion, and in the practice of preceding ages, take so much with posterity, is that before mentioned, the universal sympathy and agreement which those evils have with the corrupt nature of man.

The prophet Ezekiel observes this particularly in the Jews, chap. 20 ver. 24, that *their eyes were after their fathers' idols*, contrary to God's express forewarning, ver. 18. This was the great quarrel of the heathens against the Christian religion in the primitive times, that it was new and unknown to their fathers; and the ancient writers of those times are frequent in showing the vanity of this exception, particularly Lactantius.[304] The same prejudice does the Church of Rome sing over continually against the reformed religion: "Where was it before Luther?" &c. But this is a foolish and unreasonable diversion from the search of truth, because error is more at hand; or from the entertaining it, being found, because falsehood is in possession.

As in religion, so in the course and practice of men's lives, the stream of sin runs from one age into another, and every age makes it greater, adding something to what it receives, as rivers grow in their course by the accession of brooks that fall into them; and every man when he is born falls like a drop into this main current of corruption, and so is carried down with it, and this by reason of its strength, and his own nature, which willingly dissolves into it, and runs along with it. In this is manifest the power of Divine grace in a man's conversion, that it severs him so powerfully from the profane world, and gives him strength to run contrary to the great current of wickedness that is round about him, in his parents possibly, and in his kindred and friends, and most of the men that he meets. The voice of God, that powerful word of effectual calling which He speaks into the heart, makes a man break through all, and leave all to follow God, as Abraham did, being called out from his kindred and father's house, to journey towards the land that God had promised him.[305] And this is that which was spoken to the Church and to each believing soul by the Spirit of God, *Forget also your own people, and your father's house; so shall the king greatly desire your beauty*.[306] Regard not what others think, though they are your nearest friends, but study only to please Him, and then you shall please Him indeed. Do not deform your face with looking out asquint to the custom of the world, but look straightforward on Him, and so you shall be beautiful in His eyes. When God calls a man in a remarkable manner, his profane friends are all in a tumult: "What needs this, to be more precise than we and all your neighbours?" But all this is a confused noise that works nothing on the heart that the Lord has touched: it must follow Him, though by trampling upon friends and kindred, if they lie in the way. We see how powerfully a word from Christ drew His disciples to leave all and follow Him.

The exhortation is against all sinful and unholy conduct, by whatever authority and example recommended to us. The Apostle's reasons in these words are strong and pressing; there is one expressed in the very name he gives it; it is *vain conversation*.

The mind of man, the guide and source of his actions, while it is estranged from God, is nothing but a forge of vanities. The Apostle St. Paul speaks this of the Gentiles, that *they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened*,[307] their great naturalists and philosophers not excepted; and the more they strove to play the wise men, the more they deceived themselves. Thus likewise, Eph 4:17. And thus the Lord complains by His prophet Isaiah, of the extreme folly of His people,[308] and by Jeremy, that their hearts are lodges of vain thoughts:[309] and these are the true cause of a *vain conversation*.

The whole course of a man's life out of Christ is nothing but a continual trading in vanity, running a circle of toil and labor, and reaping no profit at all. This is the vanity of every natural man's conduct, that not only others are not benefited by it, but it is fruitless to himself; there arises to him no solid good out of it. That is most truly vain, which attains not its proper end; now, since all a man's endeavors aim at his satisfaction and contentment, that conduct which gives him nothing of that, but removes him further from it, is justly called *vain conversation. What fruit had you then, says the Apostle, in those things whereof you are now ashamed?*[310] Either count that shame which at the best grows out of them, their fruit, or confess they have none; therefore they are called *the unfruitful works of darkness*.[311]

Let the sensuous person declare on his deathbed, what pleasure or profit then abides with him of all his former sinful delights. Let him tell if there remains anything of them all, but that which he would gladly not have to remain—the sting of an accusing conscience, which is as enduring as the delight of sin was short and vanishing. Let the covetous and ambitious declare freely, even those who have prospered most in their pursuit of riches and honor, what ease all their possessions or titles do then help them to; whether their pains are any less because their chests are full, or their houses stately, or a multitude of friends and servants are waiting on them with hat and knee. And if all these things cannot ease the body, how much less can they quiet the mind? And therefore is it not true, that all pains in these things, and the uneven ways into which they sometimes stepped aside to serve those ends, and generally, that all the ways of sin in which they have wearied themselves, were vain rollings and tossings up and down, not leading to a certain haven of peace and happiness? It is a lamentable thing to be deluded a whole lifetime with a false dream.[312]

You who are going on in the common road of sin, although many, and possibly your own parents, have trodden it before you, and the greatest part of those you now know are in it with you, and keep you company in it, yet, be persuaded to stop a little, and ask yourselves what you seek, or expect in the end of it. Would it not grieve any laboring man, to work hard all day, and have no wages to look for at night? It is a greater loss to wear out our whole life, and in the evening of our days find nothing but anguish and vexation. Let us then think this—the part of our life that is spent in the ways of sin, is all lost, fruitless, and *vain conversation*.

And in so far as the Apostle says here, *You are redeemed from this conversation*, this shows it to be a servile slavish condition, as the other word, *vain*, expresses it to be fruitless. And this is the madness of a sinner, that he imagines liberty in that which is the basest thraldom; as those poor frantic persons who are lying ragged and bound in chains, yet imagine that they are kings, that their irons are chains of gold, their rags robes, and their filthy lodge a palace. As it is misery to be liable to the sentence of death, so it is slavery to be subject to the dominion of sin; and he who is delivered from the one is likewise set free from the other. There is one redemption from both. He, who is redeemed from destruction by the blood of Christ, is likewise redeemed from that vain and unholy conversation that leads to it. So Tit 2:14. Our Redeemer was anointed for this purpose, not to free the captives from the sentence of death, and yet leave them still in prison, but to *proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound*.[313]

You easily persuade yourselves that Christ has died for you, and redeemed you from hell; but you consider not, that if so, He has likewise redeemed you from your vain conduct, and has set you free from the service of sin. Certainly, while you find not *that*, you can have no assurance of the other: if the chains of sin continue still upon you, for anything you can know, these chains bind you over to the other *chains of darkness* the Apostle speaks of.[314] Let us not delude ourselves: if we find the love of sin and of the world working stronger in our hearts than the love of Christ, we are not as yet partakers of His redemption.

But if we have indeed laid hold upon Him as our Redeemer, then are we redeemed from the service of sin; not only from the grossest profaneness, but even from all kinds of fruitless and vain conduct. And therefore we ought to stand fast in that liberty, and not to entangle ourselves again to any of our former vanities.[315]

Not redeemed with corruptible things.] From the high price of our redemption, the Apostle mainly enforces our esteem of it, and urges the preservation of that liberty so dearly bought, and the avoidance of all that unholiness and vain conversation, from which we are freed by that redemption. First, He expresses it negatively, *not with corruptible things;* (How foolish we are, who hunt them as if they were incorruptible and everlasting treasures!) no, not the best of these things, those that men value most—*not with silver and gold;* these are not of any value at all towards the ransom of souls. They cannot buy off the death of the body, nor purchase the continuation of temporal life; much less can they reach to the worth of spiritual and eternal life. The precious soul could not be redeemed except by blood, and by no blood but that of this spotless Lamb, Jesus Christ, who is God equal with the Father; and therefore His blood is called *the blood of God*.[316] So that the Apostle may well call it here *precious*, exceeding the whole world, and all things in it, in value. Therefore do not frustrate the sufferings of Christ: if He shed His blood to redeem you from sin, don't be false to His purpose.

As a Lamb without blemish.] He is that great and everlasting Sacrifice who gave value and virtue to all the sacrifices under the Law: their blood was of no worth to the purging away of sin, but by relation to His blood; and the laws concerning the choice of the Paschal Lamb, or other lambs for sacrifice, were but obscure and imperfect shadows of His purity and perfections, who is the undefiled *Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*.[317] A lamb in meekness and silence, *he opens not his mouth*.[318] And in purity here *without spot or blemish*. *My beloved*, says the spouse, *is white and ruddy*;[319] white in spotless innocence, and red in suffering a bloody death.

Forasmuch as you know.] It is that which must make all this effectual, the right knowledge and due consideration of it. You know it already, but I would have you know it better, more deeply and practically—turn it often over, be more in the study and meditation of it. There is work enough in it still for the most discerning mind; it is a mystery so deep, that you shall never reach the bottom of it, and besides, so useful, that you shall find always new profit by it. Our folly is, we gape after new things, and yet are in effect ignorant of the things we think we know best. That learned Apostle who knew so much, and spoke so many tongues, yet says, *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*.[320] And again he expresses this as the top of his ambition, *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death*.[321] That conformity is this only knowledge. He who has his lusts unmortified, and a heart unweaned from the world, though he knows all the history of the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and can discourse well of them, yet indeed he knows them not.

If you would increase much in holiness, and be strong against the temptations to sin, this is the only art of it; view much, and so seek to know much of the death of Jesus Christ. Consider often at how high a rate we were redeemed from sin, and provide this answer for all the enticements of sin and the world: "Except you can offer my soul something beyond that price that was given for it on the cross, I cannot listen to you."—"Far be it from me," will a Christian say, who considers this redemption, "that ever I should prefer a base lust, or anything in this world, or it all, to Him, who gave Himself to die for me, and paid my ransom with His blood. His matchless love has freed me from the miserable captivity of sin, and has forever fastened me to the sweet yoke of His obedience. Let Him alone dwell and rule within me, and let Him never go forth from my heart, who for my sake refused to come down from the Cross."

1Pe 1:20

Ver. 20. Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

Of all those considerations (and there are many) that may move men to obedience, there is not one that persuades both more sweetly and strongly, than the sense of God's goodness and mercy towards men; and amongst all the evidences of that, there is none like the sending and giving of His Son for man's redemption; therefore the Apostle, having mentioned that, insists further on it; and in these words expresses, 1. The purpose; 2. The performance; and, 3. The application of it.

1. The purpose or *decree foreknown;* but it is well rendered, *foreordained,* for this knowing is decreeing, and there is little either solid truth or profit in distinguishing them.

We usually say that where there is little wisdom there is much chance; and comparatively amongst men, some are far more foresighted, and of further reach than others; yet the wisest and most provident men, both lacking skill to design all things correctly, and power to act as they contrive, encounter many unexpected casualties and frequent disappointments in their undertakings. But with God, where both wisdom and power are infinite, there can be neither any chance nor resistance from without, nor any imperfection at all in the contrivance of things within Himself that can give cause to add, or abate, or alter anything in the frame of His purposes. The model of the whole world, and of all the course of time, was with Him one and the same from all eternity, and whatever is brought to pass, is exactly answerable to that pattern, for with Him *is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*.[322] There is nothing dark to the Father of lights: He sees at one view through all things and all ages, from the beginning of time to the end of it, yea, from eternity to eternity. And this incomprehensible wisdom is too wonderful for us; we do but childishly stammer when we offer to speak of it.

It is no wonder that men beat their own brains, and knock their heads against one another, in the contest of their opinions, to little purpose, in their several moldings of God's decree. Is not this to cut and square God's thoughts to ours, and examine His sovereign purposes by the low principles of human wisdom? How much more learned than all such knowledge is the Apostle's ignorance, when he cries out, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*[323] Why then should any man debate what place, in the series of God's decrees, is to be assigned to this purpose of sending His Son in the flesh? Let us rather (seeing it is manifest that it was for the redemption of lost mankind) admire that same love of God to mankind, which appears in that purpose of our recovery by the *Word made flesh;*[324] that before man had made himself miserable, yea, before either he or the world was made, this thought of boundless love was in the bosom of God, to send His Son forth from there, to bring fallen man out of misery and restore him to happiness; and to do this, not only by taking on his nature, but the curse—to shift it off from us who were sunk under it, and to bear it Himself, and by bearing it to take it away. *The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*.[325] And to this He was appointed, says the Apostle.[326]

Before the foundation of the world.] Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.[327] Although the learned probably[328] think it evincible by human reason, yet some of those who have gloried most in that, and are generally considered masters of reason, have not seen it by that light. Therefore, in order that we may have a divine belief of it, we must learn it from the word of God, and be persuaded of its truth by the Spirit of God, that the whole world, and all things in it, were drawn out of nothing by His almighty power, who is the only eternal and uncreated Being, and therefore the fountain and source of being to all things.

Foundation.] This word plainly intimates the resemblance of the world to a building; and such a building it is, as displays the greatness of Him who framed it; so spacious, rich, and comely, so firm a foundation, raised to such a high and stately roof, and set with variety of stars, as with jewels, therefore called, as some think it, the work of His fingers,[329] to express the curious artifice that appears in them. Though naturalists have attempted to give the reason for the earth's stability from its heaviness, which stays it necessarily in the lowest part of the world, yet that does not lessen our admiration of the wisdom and power of God in laying its foundation so, and establishing it; for it is His will that is the first cause of that, its nature, and has appointed that to be the property of its heaviness, to fix it there; and therefore Job alleges this amongst the wonderful works of God, and evidences of His power, that *He hangs the earth upon nothing*.[330]

Before there was time, or place, or any creature, God, the blessed Trinity, was in Himself, and as the Prophet speaks, inhabiting eternity,[331] completely happy in Himself; but intending to manifest and communicate His goodness, He gave beginning to the world, and to time with it; made all to set forth His goodness, and the most excellent of His creatures to contemplate and enjoy it. But amongst all the works He intended before time, and in time effected, this is the masterpiece, which is here said to be foreordained, the manifesting of God in the flesh for man's redemption, and that by His Son Jesus Christ as *the first-born among many brethren*,[332] that those appointed for salvation should be rescued from the common misery, and be made one mystical body, of which Christ is the head, and so entitled to that everlasting glory and happiness that He has purchased for them.

This, I say, is the great work, in which all those glorious attributes shine jointly, the wisdom, and power, and goodness, and justice, and mercy of God. As in great maps, or pictures, you will see the border decorated with meadows and fountains, and flowers, &c., represented in it, but in the middle you have the main design; thus is this foreordained redemption amongst the works of God; all His other works in the world, all the beauty of the creatures, and the succession of ages, and things that come to pass in them, are but as the border to this as the main-piece. But as a foolish unskilled beholder, not discerning the excellence of the principal piece in such maps or pictures, gazes only on the fair border, and goes no further, so do the greatest part of us: our eyes are taken with the goodly show of the world and appearance of earthly things; but this great work of God, Christ *foreordained*, and in time sent for our redemption, although it most deserves our attentive regard, yet we do not view and consider it as we ought.

2. We have the performance of that purpose, *Was manifested in these last times for you*.] He was manifested both by His incarnation, according to that word of the Apostle St. Paul, manifested in the flesh,[333] and manifested by His marvelous works and doctrine; by His sufferings and death, resurrection and ascension, by the sending down of the Holy Ghost according to His promise, and by the preaching of the Gospel, in the fullness of time that God had appointed, in which all the prophecies that foretold His coming, and all the types and ceremonies that prefigured Him, had their accomplishment.

The times of the Gospel are often called the last times by the prophets, because the Jewish priesthood and ceremonies being abolished, that which succeeded was appointed by God to remain the same to the end of the world. Besides this, the time of our Savior's incarnation may be called the last times, because although it was not near the end of time, by many ages, yet in all probability it is much nearer the end of time than the beginning of it. Some resemble the time of His sufferings in the end of the world to the paschal lamb, which was slain in the evening.

It was doubtless the suitable time; but notwithstanding, the schoolmen offer at reasons to prove the fitness of it, as their mood is to prove all things—none dare, I think, conclude, but if God had so appointed, it might have been either sooner or later. And our safest way is to rest in this, that it was the fit time, because so it pleased Him, and to seek no other reason why, having promised the Messiah so quickly after man's fall, He deferred His coming about four thousand years, and for a great part of that time shut up the knowledge of Himself and the true religion within the narrow compass of that one nation of which Christ was to be born: of these and other such things, we can give no reason but that which He teaches us in a like case, *Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in your sight*.[334]

3. The application of this manifestation, *For you*.] The Apostle represents these things to those he writes to, particularly for their use; therefore he applies it to them, but without prejudice of the believers who went before, or of those who were to follow in after-ages. He who is here said to be *fore-appointed* before the foundation of the world, is therefore called a *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*.[335] And as the virtue of His death looks backward to all preceding ages, whose faith and sacrifices looked forward to it; so the same death is of force and perpetual value to the end of the world. *After he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever*, says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews,[336] He *sat down on the right hand of God; for by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified*. The cross on which He was extended points, in the length of it, to heaven and earth, reconciling them together, and in the breadth of it, to former and following ages, as being equally salvation to both.

In this appropriating and peculiar interest in Jesus Christ is our happiness, without which it avails not that He was ordained from eternity, and manifested in time. It is not the general contemplation, but the peculiar possession of Christ, that gives both solid comfort and strong persuasion to obedience and holiness, which is here the Apostle's particular scope.

1Pe 1:21

Ver. 21. Who by him do believe in God, who raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

Now, because it is faith that gives the soul this particular title to Jesus Christ, the Apostle adds this, to declare whom he meant by *you*. *For you, says he, who by him do believe in God*, &c.

Where we have, 1. The complete object of faith. 2. The ground or warrant of it. The object, *God in Christ*. The ground or warrant, *In that he raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory*.

A man may have, while living out of Christ, yea, he must, he cannot choose but have a conviction within him, that there is a God; and further he may have, even out of Christ, some kind of belief of those things that are spoken concerning God; but to repose on God as his God and his salvation, which is indeed to believe in Him,—this cannot be but where Christ is the *medium* through which we look upon God; for as long as we look upon God through our own guiltiness, we can see nothing but His wrath, and apprehend Him as an armed enemy; and therefore are so far from resting on Him as our happiness, that the more we view it, the faster we flee from Him, and cry out, *Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*[337] But our Savior, taking sin out of the way, puts Himself between our sins and God, and so makes a wonderful change of our perception of Him. When you look through a red glass, the whole heavens seem bloody; but through pure uncolored glass, you receive the clear light that is so refreshing and comfortable to behold. When unpardoned sin is between, and we look on God through that, we can perceive nothing but anger and enmity in His countenance; but make Christ once the *medium*, our Redeemer, and through Him, as clear, transparent glass, the beams of God's favorable countenance shine in upon the soul; the Father cannot look upon His well-beloved Son, but graciously and pleasingly. God looks on us outside of Christ, sees us rebels, and fit to be condemned; we look on God as being just and powerful to punish us; but when Christ is between, God looks on us in Him as justified, and we look on God in Him as pacified, and see the smiles of His favorable countenance. Take Christ out, all is terrible—interpose Him, all is full of peace; therefore set Him always between, and by Him we shall believe in God.

The warrant and ground of believing in God by Christ is this, that God *raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory*, which evidences the full satisfaction of His death; and in all that work, both in His humiliation and exaltation, standing in our place, we may consider it, His as ours. If all is paid that could be exacted of Him, and therefore He set free from death, then are we acquitted, and have nothing to pay. If He was raised from the dead, and exalted to glory, then so shall we; He has taken possession of that glory for us, and we may judge ourselves possessed of it already, because He, our Head, possesses it.

The last words of the verse confirm this to us, implying this to be the very purpose and end for which God, having given Him to death, *raised him up and gave him glory:* it is for this end expressly, that *our faith and hope might be in God*. The last end is, that we may have life and glory through Him; the nearer end, that in the meanwhile, until we attain them, we may have firm belief and hope in them, and rest on God as the Giver of them, and so in part enjoy them beforehand, and be upheld in our joy and conflicts by the comfort of them. And as St. Stephen in his vision,[338] Faith, in a spiritual way, looks through all the visible heavens, and sees Christ at the Father's right hand, and is comforted by that in the greatest troubles, though it were amidst a shower of stones, as St. Stephen was. The comfort is no less than this, that being by faith made one with Christ, His present glory wherein He sits at the Father's right hand is assurance to us, that where He is, we shall be also.[339]

1Pe 1:22

Ver. 22. Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently.

Jesus Christ is made unto us of God, *wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*.[340] It is a known truth, and yet very necessary to be often represented to us, that redemption and holiness are undivided companions, yea, that we are redeemed on purpose for this end, that we should be holy. The pressing of this, we see, is here the Apostle's scope; and having by that reason enforced it in the general, he now takes that as concluded and confessed, and so makes use of it particularly, to exhort to that main Christian grace of brotherly love.

The obedience and holiness mentioned in the foregoing verses, comprehend the whole duties and frame of a Christian life towards God and men: and, having urged that in the general, he specifies this grace of mutual Christian love, as the great evidence of their sincerity and the truth of their love to God; for men are subject to much hypocrisy this way, and deceive themselves; if they find themselves diligent in religious exercises, they scarcely once ask their hearts how they stand affected this way, namely, in love to their brethren. They can come constantly to the church, and pray, it may be, at home too, and yet cannot find in their hearts to forgive an injury.

As forgiving injuries argues the truth of piety, so it is that which makes all conversation both sweet and profitable, and besides, it graces and commends men and their holy profession, to those who are without and strangers to it, yea, even to their enemies.

Therefore is it that our Savior does so much recommend this to His disciples, and they to others, as we see in all their Epistles. He gives it to them as the very badge and livery by which they should be known as His followers, *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another*.[341] And St. Paul is frequent in exhorting to, and extolling this grace. See Rom 12:10; Rom 13:8; Gal 5:13; Eph 4:2; and in many other places. He calls it *the bond of perfectness*,[342] the grace that unites and binds all together. So does our Apostle here, and often in this and the other Epistle: and that beloved disciple St. John, who leaned on our Savior's breast, drank deep of that spring of love that was here, and therefore it streams forth so abundantly in his writings; they contain nothing so much as this divine doctrine of love.

We have here, 1. The due qualifications of it. 2. A Christian's obligation to it.

The qualifications are three; namely, sincerity, purity, and fervency. The sincerity is expressed in the former clause of the verse, *unfeigned love*, and repeated again in the latter part, that it be *with a pure heart*, as the purity is in fervency.

1. Love must be *unfeigned*. It appears that this dissimulation is a disease that is very incident in this particular. The Apostle St. Paul has the same word;[343] and the Apostle St. John to the same sense.[344] That it have that double reality, which is opposed to double-dissembled love; that it be cordial and effectual; that the professing of it arise from truth of affection, and, as much as may be, be seconded with action; that both the heart and the hand may be the seal of it rather than the tongue; not court holy-water and empty noise of service and affection, which fears nothing more than to be put upon trial. Although your brother, with whom you converse, cannot, it may be, see through your false appearances, He who commands this love looks chiefly within, seeks it there, and, if He doesn't find it there, hates them most who most pretend it; so that the art of dissembling, though never so well studied, cannot pass in this King's court, to whom all hearts are open, and all desires known. When, after variances, men are brought to an agreement, they are much subject to this, rather to cover their remaining malices with superficial verbal forgiveness, than to dislodge them, and free the heart of them. This is a poor self-deceit. As the philosopher said to him, who being ashamed that he was seen by him in a tavern in the outer room, withdrew himself to the inner, he called after him, "That is not the way out; the more you go out that way, you will be the further within it:" so when hatreds are upon admonition not thrown out, but retire inward to hide themselves, they grow deeper and stronger than before; and those constrained semblances of reconciliation are but a false healing, do but skin the wound over, and therefore it usually breaks forth worse again.

How few there are that have truly maliceless hearts, and find this entire upright affection towards their brethren meeting them in their whole conversation, this law of love deeply impressed on their hearts, and from there expressed in their words and actions, and that is *unfeigned love*, as real to their brethren as to themselves!

2. It must be *pure*, from a pure heart. This is not all one with the former, as some take it. It is true, doubleness or hypocrisy is an impurity, and a great one; but all impurity is not doubleness: one may really mean that friendship and affection he expresses, and yet it may be most contrary to that which is here required, because impure; such a brotherly love as that of Simeon and Levi, brethren in iniquity, as the expressing them *brethren* is taken to mean.[345] When hearts are cemented together by impurity itself, by ungodly conversation and society in sin, as in uncleanness or drunkenness, &c., this as a swinish fraternity, a friendship which is contracted, as it were, by wallowing in the same mire. Call it good fellowship, or what you will, all the fruit that in the end can be expected out of unholy friendliness and fellowship in sinning together, is, to be tormented together, and to add each to the torment of another.

The mutual love of Christians must be pure, arising from such causes as are pure and spiritual, from the sense of our Savior's command and of His example; for He Himself joins that with it. *A new commandment I give unto you,* says He, *that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another*.[346] Those who are indeed lovers of God are limited; by that their hearts meet in Him, as in one center: they cannot but love one another. Where a godly man sees his Father's image, he is forced to love it; he loves those whom he perceives godly, so as to delight in them, because that image is in them; and those who appear destitute of it, he loves them so as to wish them partakers of that image. And this is all for God: he loves *amicum in Deo, et inimicum propter Deum:* that is, *he loves a friend in God, and an enemy for God*. And as the Christian's love is pure in its cause, so in its effects and exercise. His society and conversation with any, tends mainly to this, that he may mutually help and be helped in the knowledge and love of God; he desires most that he and his brethren may jointly mind their journey heavenwards, and further one another in their way to the full enjoyment of God. And this is truly the love of a pure heart, which both begins and ends in God.

3. We must love *fervently*, not after a cold indifferent manner. Let the love of your brethren be as a fire within you, consuming that selfishness which is so contrary to it, and is so natural to men; let it set your thoughts on work to study how to do others good; let your love be an active love, intense within you, and extending itself in doing good to the souls and bodies of your brethren as they need, and you are able: *Alium re, alium consilio, alium gratia*.[347]

It is self-love that contracts the heart, and shuts out all other love, both of God and man, save only so far as our own interest carries, and that is still self-love: but the love of God dilates the heart, purifies love, and extends it to all men, but after a special manner directs it to those who are more peculiarly beloved of Him, and that is here the particular love required.

Love of the brethren.] In this is implied our obligation after a special manner to love those of *the household of faith*, because they are our *brethren*. This includes not only, as Abraham says, that *there be no strife*,[348] but it binds most strongly to this sincere, and pure, and fervent love; and therefore the Apostle in the next verse repeats expressly the doctrine of the mysterious new birth, and explains more fully, that which he mentioned at the beginning of the Epistle, and again referred to, ver. 14, 17.

There is in this fervent love, sympathy with the griefs of our brethren, desire and endeavors to help them, bearing their infirmities, and recovering them too, if it may be; raising them when they fall, admonishing and reproving them as is necessary, sometimes sharply and yet still in love; rejoicing in their good, in their gifts and graces, so far from envying them, that we are as glad as if they were our own. There is the same blood running in their veins: you have the same Father and the same Spirit within you, and the same Jesus Christ, the Head of that glorious fraternity, *the first-born among many brethren*;[349] of whom the Apostle says, that He has re-collected into one all things in heaven and in earth.[350] The word is, gathered them together into one head; and so suits very fitly to express our union in Him. From whom, says he in the same Epistle,[351] the whole body is fitly compacted together; and he adds that which agrees to our purpose, that this body grows up and edifies itself in love. All of the members receive spirits from the same head, and are useful and serviceable one to another, and to the whole body. Thus, these brethren, receiving of the same Spirit from their Head, Christ, are most strongly bent to the good of one another. If there is but a thorn in the foot, the back bows, the head stoops down, the eyes look, the hands reach to it, and endeavor its help and ease: in a word, all the members partake of the good and evil, one of another. Now, by how much this body is more spiritual and lively, so much the stronger must the union and love of the parts of it be each to other. You are brethren by the same new birth, and born to the same inheritance, and such a one as shall not be an apple of strife amongst you, to beget debates and contentions: no, it is enough for all, and none shall prejudice another, but you shall have joy in the happiness one of another; since you shall then be perfect in love; all harmony, no difference in judgment or in affection, all your harps tuned to the same new song, which you shall sing forever. Let that love begin here, which shall never end.

And this same union, I think, is likewise expressed in the first words of the verse. Since you are partakers of that work of sanctification by the same word, and the same Spirit, that works it in all the faithful, and are by that called and incorporated into that fraternity, therefore live in it and like it. You are purified to it; therefore love one another after that same manner purely. Let the profane world scoff at that name of *brethren;* you will not be so foolish as to be scorned out of it, being so honorable and happy; and the day is at hand in which those who scoff you would give much more than all that the best of them ever possessed in the world, to be admitted into your number.

Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.] Here is, 1. The chief seat, or subject of the work of sanctification, *the soul*. 2. The subordinate means, *truth*. 3. The nature of, it, *obeying of truth*. 4. The chief worker of it, *the Holy Spirit*.

For the first, the chief seat of sanctification, *the soul:* it is no doubt a work that goes through the whole man, renewing and purifying all.[352] But because it purifies the soul, therefore it is that it purifies all. Impurity begins there[353]—not only evil thoughts, but all evil actions come forth from the heart, which is there all one with the soul; and therefore this purifying begins there, making the tree good that the fruit may be good.[354] It is not so much external performances that make the difference between men, as their inward temper. We meet here in the same place, and all partake of the same word and prayer; but how wide a difference is there, in God's eye, between an unwashed profane heart in the same exercise, and a soul purified in some measure in obeying the truth, and desirous to be further purified by further obeying it!

Secondly, That which is the subordinate means of this purity, is, *The Truth*, or the word of God. It is truth, and pure in itself, and it begets truth and purity in the heart, by teaching it concerning the holy and pure nature of God, showing it and His holy will, which is to us the rule of purity; and by representing Jesus Christ to us as the fountain of our purity and renovation, from whose fullness we may receive *grace for grace*.[355]

Thirdly, The nature of this work, that in which the very being of this purifying consists, is, *the receiving or obeying of this truth*. So, Gal 3:1, where it is put for right believing. The chief point of obedience is believing; the proper obedience to truth is to give credit to it; and this divine belief necessarily brings the whole soul into obedience and conformity to that pure truth which is in the word; and so the very purifying and renewing of the soul is this obedience of faith, as unbelief is its chief impurity and disobedience; therefore, Faith is said to purify the heart.[356]

Fourthly, The chief worker of this sanctification is, *the Holy Spirit of God*. They are said here to *purify themselves*, for it is certain and undeniable that the soul itself does act in believing or obeying the truth; but not of itself; it is not the first principle of motion. They purify their souls, but it is *by the Spirit*. They do it by His enlivening power, and a purifying virtue received from Him. Faith, or obeying the truth, works this purity, but the Holy Spirit works that faith; as in the fore-cited place, God is said to purify their hearts by faith. He does that by giving them the Holy Ghost. The truth is pure and purifying, yet cannot of itself purify the soul, but by the obeying or believing of it; and the soul cannot obey or believe, but by the Spirit which works in it that faith, and by that faith purifies it, and works love in it. The impurity and earthliness of men's minds is the great cause of disunion and disaffection amongst them, and of all their strifes.[357]

This Spirit is the fire that refines and purifies the soul from the dross of earthly desires which possess it, and which sublimates it to the love of God and of His saints, because they are His, and are purified by the same Spirit. It is the property of fire to draw together things of the same kind: the outward fire of enmities and persecution that is kindled against the godly by the world, does somewhat, and if it were more considered by them, would do more, in this knitting their hearts closer one to another; but it is this inward, pure, and purifying fire of the Holy Spirit, that most powerfully unites them.

The true reason why there is so little truth of this Christian mutual love amongst those that are called Christians, is, because there is so little of this purifying obedience to the truth from which it flows. Faith unfeigned would beget this love unfeigned. Men may exhort to them both, but they require the hand of God to work them in the heart.

1Pe 1:23

Ver. 23. Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever.

The two things that make up the Apostle's exhortation, are the very sum of a Christian's duty—to walk as obedient children towards God, and as loving brethren one towards another—and that it may impress us more deeply, he represents to them again that new birth he mentioned before, by which they are the children of God, and so brethren.

We shall first speak of this regeneration; and then of the seed. 1st. Of the regeneration itself. This is the great dignity of believers, that they are the sons of God,[358] as it is the great evidence of the love of God, that He has bestowed this dignity upon them.[359] For they are in no way necessary to Him: He had from eternity a Son perfectly like Himself, *the express image of his person*,[360] and one Spirit proceeding from both; and there is no creation, neither the first nor the second, which can add anything to Those and Their happiness. It is most true of that blessed Trinity, *Satis amplum alter alteri theatrum sumus*.[361] But the gracious purpose of God to impart His goodness appears in this, that He has made Himself such a multitude of sons, not only angels that are so called, but man, a little lower than them in nature, yet dignified with this name in His creation: *which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God*.[362] He had not only the impression of God's footsteps (as they speak), which all the creatures have, but of His image. And most of all in this is His rich grace magnified, that sin having defaced that image and so degraded man from his honor, and divested him of that title of sonship, and stamped our polluted nature with the marks of vileness and bondage, yea, with the very image of Satan, rebellion and enmity against God—that out of mankind thus ruined and degenerated, God should raise to Himself a new race and generation of sons.

For this design *the Word was made flesh*,[363] the Son made man, to make men the sons of God. And it is by Him alone we are restored to this; those who receive Him, receive with Him, and in Him, this privilege.[364] And therefore it is a sonship by adoption, and is so called in Scripture, in difference from His eternal and ineffable generation, who is, and was, *the only begotten of the Father*.[365] Yet, that we may know that this Divine adoption is not a mere outward relative name, as that of men, the sonship of the saints is here, and often elsewhere in Scripture, expressed by *new generation*, and *new birth*. They are *begotten of God*.[366] A new being, a spiritual life is communicated to them: they have in them of their Father's Spirit; and this is derived to them through Christ, and therefore called His Spirit.[367] They are not only accounted of the family of God by adoption, but by this new birth they are indeed His children, partakers of the Divine nature, as our Apostle expresses it.

Now though it is easy to speak and hear the words of this doctrine, yet the truth itself that is in it is so high and mysterious, that it is altogether impossible, without a portion of this new nature, to conceive of it. Corrupt nature cannot understand it. What wonder that there is nothing of it in the subtlest school of philosophers, when a very *master of Israel* mistook it grossly![368] It is indeed a great mystery, and he who was the sublimest of all the Evangelists, and therefore called the divine, the soaring eagle (as they compare him), he is more abundant in this subject than the rest.

And the most profitable way of considering this regeneration and sonship, is certainly to follow the light of those holy writings, and not to jangle in disputes about the order and manner of it, of which, though somewhat may be profitably said, and safely, namely, so much as the Scripture speaks, yet much that is spoken of it, and debated by many, is but an useless expense of time and pains. What those previous dispositions are, and how far they go, and where is the mark or point of difference between them and the infusion of spiritual life, I think are not so easily determined.

If naturalists and physicians cannot agree on the order of formation of the parts of the human body in the womb, how much less can we be peremptory in the other! If there are so many wonders (as indeed there are) in the natural structure and frame of man, how much richer in wonders must this Divine and supernatural generation be! See how David speaks of the former.[369] Spiritual things, being more refined than material things, must be far more wonderful and curious in their workmanship. But then it must be viewed with a spiritual eye. There is an unspeakable luster and beauty of the new creature, by the mixture of all Divine graces, each setting off another, as so many rich several colors in embroidery—but who can trace that Invisible Hand who works it, so as to determine the order and to say which was first, which second, and so on; whether faith or repentance, and all graces &c.? It is certain that these and all graces inseparably make up the same work, and are all in the new formation of every soul that is born again.

If the ways of God's universal providence were untraceable, then most of all the workings of His grace are conducted in a secret imperceptible way in this new birth. He gives this spiritual being as the dew that is silently and insensibly formed, and this generation of the sons of God is compared to it by the Psalmist,[370] they have this original from heaven as the dew. *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*.[371] And it is the peculiar work of the Spirit of God; as He Himself speaks of the dew to Job, *Has the rain a father? or who has begotten the drops of dew?*[372] The sharpest wits are to seek in the knowledge and discovery of it, as Job speaks of a *path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye has not seen*.[373]

To contest much, how in this regeneration He works upon the will, and renews it, is to little purpose, provided this be granted, that it is in His power to regenerate and renew a man at His pleasure: and how is it possible not to grant this, unless we will run into that error, to think that God has made a creature too hard for Himself to rule, or has willingly exempted it? And shall the works of the Almighty, and of all others especially this work, in which He glories most, fail in His hand, and remain imperfect? Shall there be any abortive births of which God is the Father? *Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth?*[374] No; no sinner so dead, but there is virtue in His hand to revive out of the very stones. Though the most impenitent hearts are as stones within them, yet He can make of them children to Abraham.[375] He can dig out the heart of stone and put a heart of flesh in its place;[376] otherwise, He would not have made such a promise. *Not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*.[377] If His sovereign will is not a sufficient principle of this regeneration, why then says the Apostle St. James, *Of his own will begat he us?* And he adds the subordinate cause, *with the word of truth*,[378] which is here called the immortal seed of this new birth.

Therefore it is that the Lord has appointed the continuation of the ministry of this word, to the end that His Church may be still fruitful, bringing forth sons unto Him; that the assemblies of His people may be like flocks of sheep coming up from the washing, none barren amongst them.[379]

Although the ministers of this word, because of their employment in dispensing it, have, by the Scriptures, the relation of parents imparted to them, which is an exceedingly great dignity for them, as they are called *co-workers* with God—and the same Apostle who writes that, calls the Galatians *my little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you;*[380] and the ministers of God have often very much pain in this travail—yet the privilege of the Father of spirits remains untouched, which is to effectually beget again those same spirits that He creates, and to make that seed of the word fruitful that way, where, and when He will. The preacher of the word, be he never so powerful, can cast this seed only into the ear: his hand reaches no further; and the hearer, by his attention, may convey it into his head: but it is the supreme Father and Teacher above who carries it into the heart, the only soil in which it proves lively and fruitful. One man cannot reach the heart of another; how should he then renew its fruitfulness? If natural births have been always acknowledged to belong to God's prerogative, (*Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward;*[381] and so Jacob answered wisely to his wife's foolish passion, *Am I in God's stead?*[382]) how much more is this new birth wholly dependent on His hand!

But though this word cannot beget without Him, yet it is by this word that He begets, and ordinarily, not without it. It is true that the substantial Eternal Word is to us, as we said, the spring of this new birth and life, the head from whom the spirits of this supernatural life flow; but that by the word here is meant the Gospel, the Apostle removes any doubt, verse the last, *And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you*. Therefore thus is this word really the seed of this new birth, because it contains and declares that other Word, the Son of God, as our life. The word is spoken in common, and so is the same to all hearers; but then, all hearts being naturally shut against it, God by His own hand opens some to receive it, and mixes it with faith; and those it renews, and restores in them the image of God, draws the traces of it anew, and makes them the sons of God. *My doctrine shall drop as the rain*, says Moses.[383] The word, as a heavenly dew, not falling by the wayside, but dropped into the heart by the hand of God's own Spirit, makes it all become spiritual and heavenly, and turns it into one of those drops of dew that the children of God are compared to, *You have the dew of your youth*.[384]

The natural state of the soul is darkness, and the word, as a Divine light shining into it, transforms the soul into its own nature: so that as the word is called light, so is the soul that is renewed by it. *You were sometimes darkness, but now are you not only enlightened, but light in the Lord*.[385] All the evils of the natural mind are often comprised under the name of darkness and error, and therefore the whole work of conversion is likewise signified by light and truth: *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth*.[386] So 2Co 4:6, alluding to the first *Fiat lux*, or *Let there be Light*,[387] in the creation. The word brought within the soul by the Spirit, lets it see its own necessity and Christ's sufficiency, convinces it thoroughly, and causes it to cast itself upon Him for life—this is the very begetting of it again to eternal life.

This efficacy of the word to prove successful seed does not hang upon the different abilities of the preachers, their more or less rhetoric or learning. It is true that eloquence has a great advantage in civil and moral things to persuade, and to draw the hearers by the ears, almost which way it will; but in this spiritual work, to revive a soul, to beget it anew, the influence of Heaven is the main thing. There is no way so common and plain, (being warranted by God in the delivery of saving truth,) but the Spirit of God can revive the soul by it; and the most skillful and authoritative way, yea, being withal very spiritual, yet may effect nothing, because left alone to itself. One word of holy Scripture, or of truth conformable to it, may be the principle of regeneration to him who has heard multitudes of excellent sermons, and has often read the whole Bible, and is still unchanged. If the Spirit of God preach that one, or any such word to the soul, *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*,[388] it will be cast down with the fear of perishing, and driven out of itself by that, and raised up and drawn to Jesus Christ by the hope of everlasting life; it will believe on Him that it may have life and be inflamed with the love of God, and give itself to Him who so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son to purchase for us that everlasting life. Thus may that word prove this immortal seed, which, though very often read and heard before, was but a dead letter. A drop of those liquors which are called spirits, operates more than large draughts of other waters; one word spoken by the Lord to the heart is all spirit, and does that which whole streams of man's eloquence could never effect.

In hearing of the word, men look usually too much upon men, and forget from what spring the word has its power; they observe too narrowly the different hand of the sowers, and depend too little on His hand, who is the great Lord of both seedtime and harvest. Be it sown by a weak hand, or a stronger, the immortal seed is still the same; yea, suppose the worst, that it be a foul hand that sows it, that the preacher himself is not so sanctified and of so edifying a life as you would wish, yet, the seed itself, being good, contracts no defilement, and may be effectual to regeneration in some, and to the strengthening of others; although he who is not renewed by it himself, cannot have much hope of success, nor reap much comfort by it, and usually does not seek nor regard it much: but all instruments are alike in an Almighty hand.

Hence learn, 1. That true conversion is not so slight a work as we commonly consider it. It is not an outward change of a few bad habits, which gains the name of a reformed man, in the ordinary dialect; it is a new birth and being, and elsewhere called a new creation. Though it be but a change in qualities, yet it is such a one, and the qualities are so far different, that it bears the name of the most substantial productions—from children of disobedience and that which is linked with it, heirs of wrath, to be sons of God, and heirs of glory! They have been given a new spirit, a free, princely, noble spirit, as the word is,[389] and this spirit acts in their life and actions.

2. Consider this dignity, and be kindled with the ambition of it. How does a Christian pity that poor vanity which men make so much noise about, of their kindred and extraction! This is worth glorying in indeed, to be of the highest blood-royal, and in the nearest relation; sons of the King of kings by this new birth. This adds matchless honor to that birth which is honorable.

But we all pretend to be of this number. If we did not endeavor to deceive ourselves, the discovery whether we are, or not, would not be so hard.

In many, their false confidence is too evident; there is no appearance in them of the Spirit of God, not a footstep like His leading, nor any trace of that character,—*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*;[390] not a lineament of God's visage, as their Father,—*If you know that he is righteous*, (says St. John,) *you know that everyone who does righteousness is born of him*.[391] And so on the other hand, how contrary to the most holy God, the lover and fountain of holiness, are those who swinishly love to wallow in the mire of unholiness! Is swearing and cursing the accent of the regenerate, the children of God? No; it is the language of hell. Do children delight to indignify and dishonor their father's name? No; earthly-mindedness is a countersign. Shall the king's children, *those who were brought up in scarlet*, as Jeremiah laments, *embrace dunghills?*[392] Princes, by their high birth and education, usually have their hearts filled with far higher thoughts than persons of lower rank: the children of the poorer sort being pinched that way, their greatest thoughts, as they grow up, are, ordinarily, how they shall shift to live, how they shall get bread; but princes think either of the conquest or governing of kingdoms. Are you not born to a better inheritance, if indeed you are born again? Why then do you vilify yourselves? Why are you not more in prayer? There are no dumb children among those who are born of God; they have all that Spirit of prayer by which they not only speak, but *cry, Abba, Father*.[393]

2dly. We come to consider the seed of this regeneration, *the word of God*. Most of us esteem the preaching of the word as a transient discourse that amuses us for an hour. We look for no more, and therefore we find no more. We receive it not as the immortal seed of our regeneration, as *the engrafted word which is able to save our souls*.[394] Oh! learn to reverence this holy and happy ordinance of God, this word of life, and know that those who are not regenerated, and so saved by it, shall be judged by it.

Not of corruptible seed.] It is a main cause of the unsuitable and unworthy behavior of Christians, (those who profess themselves such,) that a great part of them either do not know, or at least do not seriously and frequently consider, what is indeed the estate and quality of Christians, how excellent and of what descent their new nature is; therefore they are often to be reminded of this. Our Apostle here does so, and by it binds on all his exhortations.

Of this new being we have here these two things; 1. Its high original from God, Begotten again of His word; 2. That which so much commends good things, its duration. And this follows from the other; for if the principle of this life be *incorruptible*, itself must be so too. The word of God is not only a living and ever abiding word in itself, but likewise in reference to this new birth and spiritual life of a Christian; and in this sense that which is here spoken of it is intended: it is therefore called, not only an abiding word, but incorruptible seed, which expressly relates to regeneration. And because we are most sensible of the good and evil of things by comparison, the everlastingness of the word and of that spiritual life which it begets, is set off by the frailty and shortness of natural life, and of all the good that concerns it. This the Apostle expresses in the words of Isaiah,[395] in the next verse.

Ver. 24. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away.

In expressing the vanity and frailty of the natural life of man, it agrees very well with the subject to call him flesh, giving to the whole man the name of his corruptible part, both to make the wretched and perishing condition of this life more sensible, and man the more humble by it: for though by providing all for the flesh, and bestowing his whole time in endeavors concerning it, he remembers it too much, and forgets his spiritual and immortal part; yet, in that over-eager care for the flesh, he seems, in some sense, to forget that he is flesh, or, at least, that flesh is perishing, because flesh; extending his desires and projects so far for the flesh, as if it were immortal, and should always abide to enjoy and use these things. As the philosopher said of his countrymen, upbraiding at once their surfeitings and excess in feasting, and their sumptuousness in building, that "they ate as if they meant to die tomorrow, and yet built as if they were never to die:" thus in men's immoderate pursuits of earth, they seem both to forget that they are anything else beside flesh, and in this sense, too, to forget that they are flesh, that is mortal and perishing; they rightly remember neither their immortality nor their mortality. If we consider what it is to be flesh, the naming of that would be sufficient to the purpose: All man is flesh; but it is plainer thus, *All flesh is grass:* Thus, in the 78th Psalm,[396] *He remembered that they were but flesh:* that speaks their frailty enough; but it is added, to make the vanity of their estate the clearer—*a wind that passes away, and comes not again*. So Psa 103:15-16 : *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

This natural life is compared, even by natural men, to the vainest things, and they can hardly find things light enough to express its *vanity*—as it is here called grass, so they have compared the generation of men to the leaves of trees. But the light of Scripture most reveals this, and it is a lesson that requires the Spirit of God to teach it correctly. *So teach us*, says Moses, *to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*[397] And David, *Make me to know my end, how frail I am.*[398] So St. James, *What is your life? it is even a vapor.*[399] And here it is called grass. So Job, *Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and is cut down.*[400]

Grass has its root in the earth, and is fed by the moisture of it for a while; but besides that, it is under the hazard of such weather as favors it not, or of the scythe that cuts it down; give it all the forbearance that may be, let it be free from both those, yet how quickly will it wither of itself! Set aside those many accidents, the smallest of which is able to destroy our natural life, the diseases of our own bodies, and outward violence, and casualties that cut down many in their greenness, in the flower of their youth, the utmost term is not long; in the course of nature it will wither. Our life is indeed a lighted torch, either blown out by some stroke or some wind, or, if spared, yet within a while it burns away, and will die out of itself.

And all the glory of man.] This is elegantly added. There is indeed a great deal of apparent difference between the outward conditions of life amongst men. Shall the rich, and honorable, and beautiful, and healthy, go in together, under the same name, with the baser and unhappier part, the poor wretched sort of the world, who seem to be born for nothing but sufferings and miseries? At least, have the wise no advantage beyond the fools? Is all grass? Do you make no distinction? No, *all is grass*, or if you will have some other name, be it so: once this is true, that all flesh is grass; and if that glory which shines so much in your eyes, must have a difference, then this is all it can have,—it is but *the flower* of that same grass—somewhat above the common grass in gaiety, a little more beautiful, and better appareled than it, but a partaker of its frail and fading nature; it has no privilege nor immunity that way; yea, of the two, it is the less durable, and usually shorter lived.; at the best it decays with it: *The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away*.

How easily and quickly has the highest splendor of a man's prosperity been blasted, either by men's power, or by the immediate hand of God! The Spirit of the Lord blows upon it, (as Isaiah says in chap. 40:7,) and by that, not only does the grass wither, but the flower fades though never so fair. *When you correct man for iniquity*, says David, *you make his beauty to consume away like a moth.*[401] How many have the casualties of fire, or war, or shipwreck, in one day or night, or in a small part of either, turned out of great riches into extreme poverty! And the instances are not few, of those who have suddenly fallen from the top of honor into the foulest disgraces, not by degrees coming down the stair they went up, but tumbling down headlong. And the most vigorous beauty and strength of body, how does a few days' sickness, or if it escaps that, a few years' time blast that flower! Yea, those higher advantages which have somewhat both of truer and more lasting beauty in them, the endowments of wit, and learning, and eloquence, yea, and of moral goodness and virtue, yet they cannot rise above this word, they are still, in all their glory, but the *flower of grass;* their root is in the earth. Natural ornaments are of some use in this present life, but they reach no further. When men have wasted their strength, and endured the toil of study night and day, it is but a small parcel of knowledge they can attain to, and they are forced to lie down in the dust in the midst of their pursuit of it: that head which lodges most sciences shall within a while be disfurnished of them all; and the tongue that speaks most languages be silenced.

The great projects of kings and princes, and themselves also, come under this same notion; all the vast designs that are framing in their heads fall to the ground in a moment; they return to their dust, and in that day all their thoughts perish.[402] Archimedes was killed in the midst of his demonstration.

If they themselves would consider this in the heat of their affairs, it would much allay the swelling and loftiness of their minds; and if they who live upon their favor would consider it, they would not value it at such a high rate, and buy it so costly as often they do. *Men of low degree are vanity*, says the Psalmist; but he adds, *Men of high degree are a lie.*[403] From base, mean persons, we expect nothing; but the estate of great persons promises fair, and often keeps not; therefore they are a lie, although they can least endure that word.

They are, compared to persons of lower rank, as the flower to the grass—they have a somewhat fairer luster, but neither endurance nor exemption from decaying. Thus then, it is a universal and undeniable truth: it begins here with *dioti*,[404] and is as sure a conclusion as the surest of those in their best demonstrations, which they call *dioti*. And as particular men, so are all states and kingdoms; they have their budding, and flourishing, and withering, and it is in both as with flowers—when they are spread the fullest, then they are near their declining and withering. And so it is with all whole generations of men upon earth: as Solomon says, *One generation passes away, and another generation comes*,[405] but not a word of abiding at all. We, in our thoughts, shut up death into a very narrow compass, namely, into the moment of our expiring; but the truth is, as the moralist observes, it goes through all our life; for we are still losing and spending life as we enjoy it, yea, our very enjoying of it is the spending of it. Yesterday's life is dead today, and so shall this day's life be dead tomorrow. *We spend our years*, says Moses, *as a tale*,[406] or as a thought, so swift and vanishing is it. Every word helps a tale towards its end; and then, in that is the vanity, when it is done, it vanishes as a sound in the air. What has become of all the pompous solemnities of kings and princes at their births and marriages, and coronations and triumphs? They are now as a dream; as Acts 25:23.[407]

Hence learn the folly and pride of man, who can glory and please himself in the frail and wretched being he has here, who dotes on this poor natural life, and cannot be persuaded to think on one higher and more abiding, although the course of time, and his daily experience, tell him this truth, that *all flesh is grass*. Yea, the Prophet prefixes to these words a command of crying; they must be shouted aloud in our ears, before we will hear them, and by the time the sound of the cry is finished, we have forgotten it again. If we would consider this in the midst of those vanities that toss our light minds to and fro, it would give us wiser thoughts, and ballast our hearts—make them more solid and steadfast in those spiritual endeavors which concern a durable condition, a being that abides forever—in comparison of which, the longest term of natural life is less than a moment, and the happiest state of it, but a heap of miseries. If we were all more consistently prosperous than we are, yet that one thing would be enough to cry down the price we put upon this life—that it continues not. As he answered to one who had a mind to flatter him in the midst of a pompous triumph, by saying, What is wanting here? *Continuance*, said he. It was wisely said at any time, but wisest of all, to have such a sober thought in such a solemnity, in which weak heads cannot escape either to be wholly drunk, or somewhat giddy at least. Surely we forget this, when we grow vain upon any human glory or advantage; the color of it pleases us, and we forget that it is but a flower, and foolishly over-esteem it. This is like the passion for flowers which are in demand somewhere—they will give as much for one flower as would buy a good dwelling-house. Is it not a most foolish bargain, to bestow continual pains and diligence upon the purchasing of great possessions or honors, if we believe this, that the best of them is nothing more than a short-lived flower; and to neglect the purchase of those glorious mansions of eternity, a garland of such flowers, as withers not, an unfading crown, that everlasting life, and those everlasting pleasures, that are at the right hand of God?

Now, that life which shall never end must begin here; it is the new spiritual life, of which the word of God is the immortal seed; and in opposition to corruptible seed and the corruptible life of flesh, it is here said to endure forever. And for this reason is the frailty of natural life mentioned, so that our affections might be drawn off from it to this spiritual life, which is not subject to death.

1Pe 1:25

Ver. 25. But the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.

The word of God is so like Himself, and carries so plainly the image and expression of His power and wisdom, that where they are spoken of together, it is sometimes doubtful whether the expressions are to be referred to Himself or to His word: (as Heb 4:12; and so here:) but there is no hazard in referring them either way, since there is truth in both, and pertinence too; for those who refer them to God, affirm that they are intended for the extolling of His word, being the subject in hand, and that we may know it to be like Him. But I rather think here that these words are meant of the word—it is called quick or living (*zao*) as here and Heb 4:12 : and the phrase, *abiding forever*, is expressly repeated here, in the Prophet's words. And (with respect to those learned men who apply them to God) I don't remember that this *abiding forever* is used to express God's eternity in Himself. However, this incorruptible seed is the living and everlasting word of the living and everlasting God, and is therefore such, because He, whose it is, is such.

Now, this is not to be taken in an abstract sense of the word only in its own nature, but as the principle of regeneration, the seed of this new life; because the word is enlivening and living, therefore those with whom it is effectual, and into whose hearts it is received, are begotten again and made alive by it; and because the word is incorruptible, and endures forever, that life begotten by it is such too, and cannot perish or be cut down, as the natural life—no, this spiritual life of grace is the certain beginning of that eternal life of glory, and shall issue in it, and therefore has no end.

As the word of God in itself cannot be abolished, but surpasses the endurance of heaven and earth, as our Savior teaches; and all the attempts of men against the Divine truth of that word to undo it, are as vain as if they should consult to pluck the sun out of the firmament; so, likewise, in the heart of a Christian, it is immortal and incorruptible. Where it is once received by faith, it cannot be obliterated again—all the powers of darkness cannot destroy it, although they should be never so diligent in their attempts to do so. And this is the comfort of the Saints, that although the life, which God by His word has breathed into their souls, has many and strong enemies, which they themselves could never hold out against, yet for His own glory, and His promise's sake, He will maintain that life, and bring it to its perfection; *The Lord will perfect that which concerns me*, says the Psalmist.[408] It is grossly contrary to the truth of the Scriptures to imagine that those who are thus renewed can be unborn again. This new birth is but once, of one kind—though they are subject to frailties and weaknesses here in this spiritual life, yet not to death anymore, nor to such way of sinning as would extinguish this life. This is that which the Apostle John says, He who is born of God sins not; and the reason he adds is the same that is here given, the permanence and incorruptibility of this word, The seed of God abides in him.[409]

This is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.] It is not sufficient to have these thoughts of the word of God in a general way, and not to know what that word is; but we must be persuaded that that word which is *preached to us* is this very word of so excellent virtue, and of which these high things are spoken; that it is *incorruptible* and *abides forever*, and therefore surpasses all the world, and all the excellences and glory of it. Although delivered by weak men, the Apostles,—and by far weaker than them in the constant ministry of it, yet it loses none of its own virtue; for that depends upon the first Owner and Author of it, the ever-living GOD, who by it begets His chosen unto life eternal.

This, therefore, is that which we should learn thus to hear, and thus to receive, and esteem, and love, this holy, this living word; to despise all the glittering vanities of this perishing life, all outward pomp, yea, all inward worth, all wisdom and natural endowments of mind, in comparison to the heavenly light of the Gospel preached to us—rather to hazard all than lose that, and banish all other things from the place that is due to it; to lodge it alone in our hearts, as our only treasure here, and the certain pledge of that treasure of glory laid up for us in Heaven. To which blessed state may God of His infinite mercy bring us! Amen.

CHAPTER II.

1 Peter 2

1Pe 2:1-2

Ver. 1. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies; and envies, and all evil speakings,

Ver. 2. As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

The same power and goodness of God that manifests itself in giving being to His creatures, appears likewise in sustaining and preserving them. To give being is the first, and to support it is the continued effect of that power and goodness. Thus it is both in the first creation, and in the second. In the first, the creatures to which He gave life, He provided suitable nourishment to uphold that life;[1] so here, in the close of the former chapter, we find the doctrine of the new birth and life of a Christian, and in the beginning of this, the proper food for that life. And it is the same word by which we there find it to be begotten, that is here the nourishment of it; and therefore Christians are here exhorted by the Apostle so to esteem and so to use it; and that is the main scope of the words.

Observe in general—The word, the principle, and the support of our spiritual being, is both the incorruptible seed and the incorruptible food of that new life of grace, which must therefore be an incorruptible life; and this may convince us that the ordinary thoughts, even of us who hear this word, are far below the true excellence and worth of it. The stream of custom and our profession brings us here, and we sit out our hour under the sound of this word; but how few consider and prize it as the great ordinance of God for the salvation of souls, the beginner and the sustainer of the Divine life of Grace within us! And certainly, until we have these thoughts of it, and seek to feel it thus ourselves, although we hear it most frequently, and let slip no occasion, yea, hear it with attention and some present delight, yet, still we miss the right use of it, and turn it from its true end, while we take it not as *the engrafted word which is able to save our souls*.[2]

Thus ought those who preach to speak it; to endeavor their utmost to accommodate it to this end, that sinners may be converted, begotten again, and believers nourished and strengthened in their spiritual life; to regard no lower end, but aim steadily at that mark. Their hearts and tongues ought to be set on fire with holy zeal for God and love to souls, kindled by the Holy Spirit, who came down on the Apostles in the shape of fiery tongues.

And those who hear should remember this as the purpose of their hearing, that they may receive spiritual life and strength by the word. For though it seems a poor despicable business, that a frail sinful man like yourselves should speak a few words in your hearing, yet, look upon it as the way by which God communicates happiness to those who believe, and works that believing unto happiness, alters the whole frame of the soul, and makes a new creation, as it begets it again to the inheritance of glory—consider it thus, which is its true notion; and then what can be so precious? Let the world disesteem it as they will, you know that *it is the power of God unto salvation*.[3] *The preaching of the cross is to those who perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God*,[4] says the Apostle; and if you would have the experience of this, if you would have life and growth by it, you must look above the poor worthless messenger, and call in His almighty help, who is the Lord of life. As the Philosophers affirm, that if the heavens should stand still, there would be no generation or flourishing of anything here below, so it is the moving and influence of the Spirit that makes the Church fruitful. If you would but do this before you come here, present the blindness of your minds, and the deadness of your hearts to God, and say, "Lord, here is an opportunity for You to show the power of Your word. I would find life and strength in it; but neither can I who hear, nor he who speaks, make it thus unto me—that is Your prerogative; say the word and it shall be done." *God said, Let there be light; and there was light*.[5]

In this exhortation to the due use of the word, the Apostle continues the resemblance of that new birth he mentioned in the preceding chapter.

As new-born babes.] Don't be satisfied with yourselves until you find some evidence of this new, this supernatural life. There are delights and comforts in this life, in its lowest condition, that would persuade us to look after it if we knew them; but as most cannot be made aware of these, consider therefore the end of it. Better never to have been, than not to have been partaker of this new being. *Except a man be born again*, says our Savior, *he cannot see the kingdom of God*.[6] Surely those who are not born again, shall one day wish they had never been born. What a poor wretched thing is the life that we have here! a very heap of follies and miseries! Now if we would share in a happier being after it, in the life that doesn't end, it must begin here. Grace and glory are one and the same life, only with this difference, that the one is the beginning, and the other the perfection of it; or, if we do call them two several lives, yet the one is the undoubted pledge of the other. It was a strange word for a heathen to say, that that day of death we fear so—*aeterni natalis est*—is the birthday of eternity. Thus it is indeed to those who are here born again: this new birth of grace is the sure earnest and pledge of that birthday of glory. Why do we not then labor to make this certain by the former? Is it not a fearful thing to spend our days in vanity, and then lie down in darkness and sorrow forever; to disregard the life of our soul, while we may and should be making provision for it, and then, when it is going out, cry, *Quo nunc abibis?*—Where are you going, O my soul?

But this new life puts us out of the danger and fear of that eternal death. *We have passed from death unto life*,[7] says St. John, speaking of those who are born again; and being passed, there is no re-passing, no going back from this life to death again.

This new birth is the same that St. John calls the *first resurrection*, and he pronounces them blessed who partake of it; *Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power*.[8]

The weak beginnings of grace, in comparison to the further strength attainable even in this life, are sometimes expressed as the infancy of it; and so believers should not continue to be infants: if they do, it is reprovable in them, as we see, Eph 4:14; 1Co 2:2; 1Co 14:20; Heb 5:12. Though the Apostle writes to new converts, and so may possibly imply the tenderness of their beginnings of grace, yet I think that infancy is here to be taken in such a sense as corresponds to a Christian in the whole course and best state of his spiritual life here below. So, likewise, the *milk* here recommended is suitable to this sense of infancy; and not to the former, (as it is in some of those cited places, where it means the easiest and first principles of religion, and so is opposed to the higher mysteries of it, as to strong meat;) but here it signifies the whole word of God, and all its wholesome and saving truths, as the proper nourishment of the children of God. And so the Apostle's words are a standing exhortation for all Christians of all degrees.

And the whole state and course of their spiritual life here is called their *infancy*, not only as opposed to the corruption and wickedness of the old man, but likewise as signifying the weakness and imperfection of it at its best in this life, compared with the perfection of the life to come—for the weakest beginnings of grace are by no means so far below the highest degree of it possible in this life, as that highest degree falls short of the state of glory; so that, if one measure of grace is called infancy in comparison to another, much more is all grace infancy in comparison to glory. And surely, as for duration, the time of our present life is far less compared to eternity, than the time of our natural infancy is to the rest of our life; so that we may be still called but *new* or lately *born*. Our best pace and strongest walking in obedience here, is but as the stepping of children when they begin to go by hold, compared to the perfect obedience in glory when *we shall follow the Lamb wherever he goes*. All our knowledge here is but as the ignorance of infants, and all our expressions of God and of His praises but as the first stammerings of children, in comparison of the knowledge we shall have of Him hereafter, when *we shall know as we are known*, and of the praises we shall then offer Him, when that new song shall be taught us. A child has in it a reasonable soul, and yet, by the indisposedness of the body, and abundance of moisture, it is so bound up, that its difference from the beasts in partaking of a rational life, is as apparent as afterwards; and thus the spiritual life that is from above infused into a Christian, although it acts and works in some degree, yet it is so clogged with the natural corruption still remaining in him, that the excellence of it is much clouded and obscured; but in the life to come, it shall have nothing at all encumbering and indisposing it. And this is the Apostle St. Paul's doctrine.[9]

And this is the wonder of Divine grace, which brings such small beginnings to a height of perfection that we are not able to conceive of—that a little spark of true grace, which is not only indiscernible to others, but often to the Christian himself, should yet be the beginning of that condition in which they shall shine brighter than the sun in the firmament. The difference is great in our natural life, in some persons especially; that those who in infancy were so feeble and wrapped up as others in swaddling clothes, yet afterwards come to excel in wisdom and in the knowledge of sciences, or to be commanders of great armies, or to be kings; but the distance is far greater and more admirable between the weakness of these newborn babes, the small beginnings of grace, and our after-perfection, that fullness of knowledge that we look for, and that crown of immortality which all those are born to, who are born of God.

But as in the faces or actions of some children, some characters and presages of their after-greatness have appeared, (as a singular beauty in Moses' face, as they write of him, and as Cyrus was made king among the shepherds' children with whom he was brought up, &c.,) so also, certainly in these children of God there will be some characters and evidences that they are born for Heaven by their new birth. The holiness and meekness, the patience and faith, that shine in the actions and sufferings of the saints, are characters of their Father's image, and show their high origin, and foretell their glory to come; such a glory, as does not only surpass the world's thoughts, but the thoughts of the children of God themselves.

Now, that the children of God may grow by the word of God, the Apostle requires these two things of them: 1. The innocence of children; 2. The appetite of children. For this expression, *as newborn babes*, as I think, is relative not only to the desiring of *the milk of the word*, ver. 2, but to the former verse, the *putting off malice*. So the Apostle Paul exhorts, *Howbeit in malice be you children*.[10]

Wherefore laying aside.] This signifies that we are naturally prepossessed with these evils, and therefore we are exhorted to put them off. Our hearts are by nature nothing more than cages of those unclean birds—malice, envy, hypocrisies, &c. The Apostles sometimes name some of these evils, and sometimes others of them, but they are inseparable,—all one garment, and all included under that one word, *the old* Man 1:11 which the Apostle exhorts Christians to put off—and here it is pressed as a necessary evidence of their new birth, and furtherance of their spiritual growth, that these base habits be thrown away; ragged, filthy habits, unbecoming the children of God. They are the proper marks of an unrenewed mind, the very character of the children of Satan, for they are his image. He has his names from enmity, and envy, and slandering; and he is that grand hypocrite and deceiver, who can transform himself *into an angel of light*.[12]

So, on the contrary, the Spirit of God who dwells in His children is the Spirit of meekness, and love, and truth. That dovelike Spirit which descended on our Savior, is communicated from Him to believers. It is the grossest impudence to pretend to be Christians, and yet to entertain hatred and envyings upon whatever occasion; for there is nothing more recommended to them by our Savior's own doctrine, nothing more impressed upon their hearts by His Spirit, than love. *Kakia* may be taken generally, but I conceive it intends that which we particularly call malice.

Malice and envy are but two branches growing out of the same bitter root; self-love and evil-speakings are the fruit they bear. Malice is properly the procuring or wishing another's evil, envy the repining at his good; and both these vent themselves by evil speaking. This infernal fire within smokes and flashes out by the tongue, which St. James says, *is set on fire of hell*,[13] and fires all about it; misjudging the actions of those they hate or envy, aggravating their failings, and detracting from their virtues, taking all things by the left ear; for (as Epictetus says,) Every thing has two handles. The art of taking things by the better side, which charity always does, would save much of those janglings and heart-burnings that so abound in the world. But folly and perverseness possess the hearts of most people, and therefore their discourses are usually the vent of these; *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*.[14] The unsavory breaths of men show their inward corruption. Where shall a man come, almost, in societies, but his ears shall be beaten with the unpleasant noise (surely it is so to a Christian mind) of one detracting and disparaging another? And yet this is extreme baseness, and the practice only of false counterfeit goodness, to make up one's own esteem out of the ruins of the good name of others. Real virtue neither needs nor can endure this dishonest shift; it can subsist of itself, and therefore ingenuously commends and acknowledges what good is in others, and loves to hear it acknowledged: and neither readily speaks nor hears evil of any, but rather, where duty and conscience require not discovery, casts a veil upon men's failings to hide them: this is the true temper of the children of God.

These evils of *malice*, and *envies*, and *evil speakings*, and such like, are not to be overlooked by us, in ourselves, and conveyed under better appearances, but to be cast away; not to be covered, but put off; and therefore that which is the upper garment and cloak of all other evils, the Apostle here commands us to cast that off too, namely, *hypocrisies*.

What avails it to wear this mask? A man may indeed in the sight of men act his part handsomely under it, and pass so for a time; but know we not that there is an Eye who sees through it, and a Hand that, if we will not pull off this mask, will pull it off to our shame, either here in the sight of men, or, if we should escape all our life, and go fair off the stage under it, yet that there is a day appointed in which all hypocrites shall be unveiled, and appear what they are indeed before men and angels? It is a poor thing to be approved and applauded by men while God condemns, to whose sentence all men must stand or fall. Oh! seek to be approved and justified by Him, and then, who shall condemn?[15] It is doesn't matter who does. How easily may we bear the mistakes and dislikes of the entire world, if He declares Himself well pleased with us! *It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; he who judges me is the Lord*,[16] says the Apostle.

But these evils are here particularly to be put off, as contrary to the right and profitable receiving of the word of God; for this part of the exhortation (*Laying aside*) looks to that which follows (*Desire*, &c.), and is especially so to be considered.

There is this double task in religion—when a man enters upon it he is not only to be taught true wisdom, but he is also, yea, first of all, to be untaught the errors and wickedness that are deep-rooted in his mind, which he has not only learned by the corrupt conversation of the world, but brought the seeds of them into the world with him. They improve and grow indeed by the favor of that example which is round about a man, but they are originally in our nature as it is now; they are inherent to us, besides continual custom, which is another nature. No one comes to the school of Christ suiting the Philosopher's word, *ut tabula rasa*—as blank paper—to receive his doctrine: but, on the contrary, all scribbled and blurred with such base habits as these, *malice, hypocrisies, envies*, &c.

Therefore, the first work is to raze out these, to cleanse and purify the heart from these blots, these foul characters, so that it may receive the impression of the image of God. And because it is the word of God that both begins and continues this work, and draws the lineaments of that Divine image on the soul, therefore, in order to receive this word rightly, and to be properly affected by it, the conforming of the soul to Jesus Christ, which is the true growth of the spiritual life, it is required beforehand that the hearts of those who hear it be purged of these and other such impurities.

These dispositions are so opposite to the profitable receiving of the word of God, that while they possess and rule the soul, it cannot at all embrace these Divine truths; while it is filled with such guests, there is no room to entertain the word.

They cannot dwell together, because of their contrary nature; the word will not mix with these. The saving mixture of the word of God in the soul is what the Apostle speaks of, and he assigns the lack of it as the cause of unprofitable hearing of the word—*not being mixed with faith in those who heard it*.[17] For by that the word is concocted into the nourishment of the life of grace united to the soul, and mixed with it, by being mixed with faith, as the Apostle's expression means: that is the proper mixture it requires. But with the qualities here mentioned it will not mix; there is a natural antipathy between them, as strong as in those things in nature, that cannot be brought by any means to agree and mingle together. Can there be any thing more contrary than the *good word of God*,[18] as the Apostle calls it, and those evil speakings? than the word, which is of such excellent sweetness, and the bitter words of a malignant tongue? than the word of life, and words *full of deadly poison?* For so slanders and defamings of our brethren are termed. And is not all *malice* and envy most opposite to the word, which is the message of *peace* and *love?* How can the gall of *malice* and this *milk* of the word agree? Hypocrisy and guile stand in direct opposition to the name of this word, which is called the *word of truth;* and here the very word shows this contrariety, *sincere milk,* and a double, insincere mind.

These two are necessary conditions of good nourishment: 1st, That the food be good and wholesome; 2ndly, That the inward constitution of those who use it be so too. And if this fails, the other profits not. This sincere milk is the only proper nourishment of spiritual life, and there is no defect or undue quality in it; but the greatest part of hearers are inwardly unwholesome, diseased with the evils here mentioned, and others of the same nature; and, therefore, either have no kind of appetite to the word at all, but rather feed upon such trash as suits with their distemper (as some kind of diseases incline those who have them to eat coals or lime, &c.), or, if they are in any way desirous to hear the word, and seem to feed on it, yet the noxious humors that abound in them make it altogether unprofitable, and they are not nourished by it. This evil of malice and envying, so ordinary among men (and, which is most strange, amongst Christians), like an overflowing of the gall, possesses their whole minds; and not only are they not nourished by the word they hear, but are made the worse by it; their disease is fed by it, as an unwholesome stomach turns the best meat it receives into that bad humor that abounds in it. Don't they do so, who observe what the word says, in order to be better enabled to discover the failings of others, and speak maliciously and uncharitably of them, and vent themselves, as is too common—This word met well with such a one's fault, and this with another's?—Is not this to feed these diseases of *malice, envy*, and *evil speakings*, with this *pure milk*, and make them grow, instead of growing by it ourselves in grace and holiness?

Thus, likewise, the hypocrite turns all that he hears of this word, not to the inward renovation of his mind, and redressing what is amiss there, but only to the composing of his outward carriage, and to enable himself to act his part better—to be more cunning in his own faculty, a more refined and expert hypocrite; not to grow more a Christian indeed, but more in appearance only, and in the opinion of others.

Therefore it is a very necessary admonition, considering these evils are so natural to men, and so contrary to the nature of the word of God, that they be purged out, so that it might be profitably received. A very similar exhortation to this has the Apostle St. James, and some of the same words, but in another metaphor: *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word*.[19] He compares the word to a plant of excellent virtue, the very tree of life, the word that is able to save your souls; but the only soil in which it will grow is a heart full of meekness, a heart that is purged of those luxuriant weeds that grow so rank in it by nature; they must be plucked up and thrown out to make place for this word.

And there is such a necessity for this, that the most approved teachers of wisdom, in a human way, have required of their scholars that, to the end their minds may be capable of it, they should be purified from vice and wickedness. For this reason the Philosopher considers young men unsuitable hearers of moral philosophy, because of their abundant and unbridled passions, granting that, if those were composed and ordered, they might be admitted. And it was Socrates' custom, when they asked him a question, seeking to be informed by him,—before he would answer them, he asked them concerning their own qualities and course of life.

Now, if men require a calm and purified disposition of mind to make it capable of their doctrine, how much more is it suitable and necessary for learning the doctrine of God, and those deep mysteries that His word opens up! It is well expressed in that Apocryphal book of Wisdom, that *Froward thoughts separate from God, and into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter:*[20] no, indeed, that is a very unfit dwelling for it; and even a heathen (Seneca) could say, The mind that is impure is not capable of God and Divine things. Therefore we see the strain of that book of Proverbs that speaks so much of this wisdom; it requires, in the first chapter, that those who would hear it, do retire themselves from all ungodly customs and practices. And, indeed, how can the soul apprehend spiritual things, that is not in some measure refined from the love of sin, which abuses and bemires the minds of men, and makes them unable to arise to heavenly thoughts? *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*,[21] says our Savior: not only shall they see Him perfectly hereafter, but so far as they can receive Him, He will impart and make Himself known unto them here. *If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him*.[22] What makes the word obscure is the filthy mists within; whereas, on the contrary, He will in just judgment hide Himself, and the saving truth of His word, from those who entertain and delight in sin; the very sins in which they delight shall obscure and darken the light of the Gospel to them, so that though it shines clear as the sun at noonday, they shall be as those who live in a dungeon—they shall not discern it.

And as those who have the evils here mentioned reigning and in full strength within them, receive no benefit by the word, so with those who are indeed born again, the more they retain of these evils, the less shall they find the influence and profit of the word; for this exhortation concerns them. Some of them may possibly have a great remainder of these corruptions unmortified; therefore they are exhorted to lay aside entirely those evils, *all malice, hypocrisies*, &c., else, although they hear the word often, yet they will be in a spiritual atrophy; they will eat much, but grow nothing by it; they will find no increase of grace and spiritual strength.

If we want to know the main cause of our fruitless hearing of the word, here it is; men do not bring meek and guileless spirits to it, not minds emptied and purified to receive it, but stuffed with malice, and hypocrisy, and pride, and other such evils; and where should the word enter, when all is so taken up? And if it did enter, how should it prosper amongst so many enemies, or at all abide amongst them? Either they will turn it out again, or choke and kill the power of it. We think religion and our own lusts and secret heart-idols should agree together, because we would have it so—but this is not possible. Therefore labor to entertain the word of truth in the love of it, and lodge the mystery of faith *in a pure conscience*,[23] as the Apostle St. Paul speaks. Join those together with David, *I hate vain thoughts: but your law do I love*.[24] And as here our Apostle, *Lay aside all malice, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings,* and so receive the word, or else look for no benefit by it here, nor for salvation by it hereafter; but cast out all impurity, and give your whole heart to it; so desire it, that you may grow, and then, as you desire, you shall grow by it.

Every real believer has received a life from Heaven, far more excelling our natural life than that excels the life of the beasts. And this life has its own peculiar desires and delights, which are the proper actings, and the certain characters and evidence of it: amongst others this is one, and a main one, corresponding to the like desire in natural life—namely, a desire for food; and because it is here still imperfect, therefore the natural end of this is, not only nourishment, but growth, as it is here expressed.

The sincere milk of the word.] The life of grace is the proper life of a reasonable soul, and without it the soul is dead, as the body is without the soul; so that without untruth this may be rendered reasonable milk, as some read it; but certainly that reasonable milk is the word of God, *The milk of the word*.

It was before called *the immortal seed*, and here it is the milk of those who are born again, and thus it is nourishment very agreeable to their spiritual life, according to the saying, *Iisdem alimur ex quibus constamus*.[25] As the milk that infants draw from the breast is the most suitable food for them, being of that same substance that nourished them in the womb; so, when they are brought forth, that food follows them as it were for their supply, in the way that is provided in nature for it; by certain veins it ascends into the breasts, and is there fitted for them, and they are by nature directed to find it there. Thus, as a Christian begins to live by the power of the word, so he is by the nature of that spiritual life directed to that same word as its nourishment. To follow the resemblance further in the qualities of milk, after the monkish way, that runs itself out of breath in allegory, I conceive is neither solid nor profitable; and to speak freely, the curious searching of the similitude in other qualities of milk, seems to wrong the quality here given it by the Apostle, in which it is so well resembled by milk, namely, the simple pureness and sincerity of the word; besides that the pressing of comparisons of this kind too far, proves often so constrained before they have finished it, that by too much drawing they bring forth blood instead of milk.

Pure and unmixed, as milk drawn immediately from the breast; the pure word of God without the mixture, not only of error, but of all other composition of vain unprofitable subtleties, or affected human eloquence, such as become not the majesty and gravity of God's word. *If any man speak*, says our Apostle, *let him speak as the oracles of God*.[26] Light conceits and flowers of rhetoric wrong the word more than they can please the hearers: the weeds among the corn make it look gay, but it were all the better they were not amongst it. Nor can those mixtures be pleasing to any but carnal minds. Those who are indeed the children of God, as infants who like their breast-milk best pure, do love the word best so, and wherever they find it so, they relish it well; whereas natural men cannot love spiritual things for themselves, desire not the word for its own sweetness, but would have it sauced with such conceits as possibly spoil the simplicity of it; or at the best, love to hear it for the wit and learning which, without any wrongful mixture of it, they find in one delivering it more than another. But the natural and genuine appetite of the children of God is to the word for itself, and only as milk, *sincere milk;* and where they find it so, from whomever or in whatever way delivered to them, they feed upon it with delight. Before conversion, wit or eloquence may draw a man to the word, and possibly prove a happy bait to catch him (as St. Augustine reports of his hearing St. Ambrose), but once born again, then it is the milk itself that he desires for itself.

Desire the sincere milk.] Not only hear it because it is your custom, but desire it because it is your food. And it is, 1. A natural desire, as the infant's of milk; not upon any external respect or inducement, but from an inward principle and bent of nature. And because natural, therefore, 2. Earnest; not a cold indifferent willing, that doesn't care whether it obtains it, but a vehement desire, as the word signifies, and as the resemblance clearly bears; as a child who will not be stilled till it has the breast; offer it what you will, silver, gold, or jewels, it regards them not, these answer not its desire, and that must be answered. Thus David, *My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto your judgments;*[27] as a child likely to break its heart with crying for want of the breast. And again, because natural, it is, 3. Constant. The infant is not cloyed or wearied with daily feeding on the breast, but desires it every day, as if it had never had it before: thus the child of God has an unchangeable appetite for the word: it is daily new to him; he finds still fresh delight in it. Thus David, as before cited, *My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto your judgments at all times*. And then this law was his meditation day and night.[28] Whereas a natural man is easily surfeited of it, and the very commonness and cheapness of it makes it contemptible to him. And this is our case; that while we should wonder at God's singular goodness to us, and therefore prize His word all the more, that very thing makes us despise it—while others, our brethren, have bought this milk with their own blood, we have it upon the easiest terms that could be wished, only for the desiring, without the hazard of bleeding for it, and scarcely at the pains of sweating for it.

That you may grow thereby.] This is not only the purpose for which God has provided His children with the word, and moves them to desire it, but that which they are to intend in their desire and use of it; and, answerable to God's purpose, they are therefore to desire it, because it is proper for this end, and that by it they may attain this end, *to grow thereby*. And herein, indeed, these children differ from infants in the natural life, who are directed to their food beside their knowledge, and without intention of its end; but this rational milk is to be desired by the children of God in a rational way, knowing and intending its end, having the use of natural reason renewed and sanctified by supernatural grace.

Now the end of this desire is, growth. Desire the word, not that you may only hear it—that is to fall very far short of its true end—yea, it is to take the beginning of the work for the end of it. The ear is indeed the mouth of the mind, by which it receives the word, (as Elihu compares it, Job 34:2,) but you know that meat which goes no further than the mouth cannot nourish. Neither should you desire the word only to satisfy a custom; it would be a great folly to make such superficial a thing the purpose of so serious a work. Again, to hear it only to stop the mouth of conscience, that it may not clamor more for the gross impiety of condemning it, this is to hear it, not out of desire, but out of fear. To desire it only for some present pleasure and delight that a man may find in it, is not the due use and end of it: that there is delight in it, may help to commend it to those who find it so, and so be a means to advance the end; but the end it is not. To seek no more than a present delight, which vanishes with the sound of the words that die in the air, is not to desire the word as meat, but as music, as God tells the prophet Ezekiel of his people.[29] *And, lo, you are to them as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they do them not*. To desire the word for the increase of knowledge, although this is necessary and commendable, and being rightly qualified, is a part of spiritual growth, yet, take it as going no further, it is not the true end of the word. Nor is the venting of that knowledge in speech and frequent discourse of the word and the Divine truths that are in it; which, where it is governed with Christian prudence, is not to be despised, but commended; yet, certainly, the highest knowledge, and the most frequent and skillful speaking of the word, severed from the growth here mentioned, misses the true end of the word. If anyone's head or tongue should grow apace, and all the rest stand at a stay, it would certainly make him a monster; and they are no other, who are knowing and discoursing Christians, and grow daily in that, but not at all in holiness of heart and life, which is the proper growth of the children of God. Appropriate to their case is Epictetus's comparison of the sheep; they return not what they eat in grass, but in wool. David, in that 119th Psalm, which is wholly spent upon this subject, the excellence and use of the word of God, expresses, ver. 15, 16, 24, his delight in it, his earnest desire to be further taught, and to know more of it; his readiness to speak of it, ver. 13, 27; but withal, you know, he joins his desire and care to keep it, to hide it in his heart, ver. 5, 11; to make it the man of his counsel, to let it be as the whole assembly of his private counselors, and to be ruled and guided by it; and with him to use it so, is indeed to grow by it.

If we know what this spiritual life is, and of what the nature of it consists, we may easily know what is the growth of it. When holiness increases, when the sanctifying graces of the Spirit grow stronger in the soul, and consequently act more strongly in the life of a Christian, then he grows spiritually.

And as the word is the means of begetting this spiritual life, so likewise of its increase.

1. This will appear, if we consider the nature of the word in general, that it is spiritual and Divine, treats of the highest things, and therefore has in it a fitness to elevate men's minds from the earth, and to assimilate to itself such as are often conversant with it; as all kind of doctrine readily does to those who are much in it, and apply their minds to study it. Doubtless, such kind of things as are frequent with men, have an influence on the disposition of their souls. The Gospel is called light, and the children of God are likewise called light, as being transformed into its nature; and this they are still the more, by more hearing of it, and so they grow.

2. If we look more particularly unto the strain and tenor of the word, it is most fit for increasing the graces of the Spirit in a Christian; for there are in it particular truths relative to them, that are apt to excite them, and set them on work, and so to make them grow, as all habits do, by acting. It does (as the Apostle's word may be translated) stir up the sparks, and blow them into a greater flame, make them burn clearer and hotter. This it does both by particular exhortation to the study and exercise of those graces, sometimes pressing one, and sometimes another: and by right representing to them their objects. The word feeds faith, by setting before it the free grace of God, His rich promises, and His power and truth to perform them all; shows it the strength of the new covenant, not depending upon it, but holding in Christ in whom all the promises of God are *yea* and *amen;* and drawing faith still to rest more entirely upon His righteousness. It feeds repentance by making the vileness and deformity of sin daily more clear and visible. Still as more of the word has admission into the soul, the more it hates sin, sin being the more discovered and the better known in its own native color: as the more light there is in a house, the more any thing that is unclean or deformed is seen and disliked. Likewise it increases *love to God*, by opening up still more and more of His infinite excellence and loveliness. As it borrows the resemblance of the vilest things in nature to express the foulness and hatefulness of sin, so all the beauties and dignities that are in all the creatures are called together in the word to give us some small scantling of that Uncreated Beauty who alone deserves to be loved. Thus might it be instanced in respect to all other graces.

But above all other considerations, this is observable in the word as the increaser of grace, that it holds forth Jesus Christ to our view to look upon not only as the perfect pattern, but also as the full fountain of all grace, from whose fullness we all receive. The contemplation of Him as the perfect image of God, and then drawing from Him as having in Himself a treasure for us, these give the soul more of that image which is truly spiritual growth. This the Apostle expresses excellently[30] speaking of the ministry of the Gospel revealing Christ, that *beholding in him* (as it is, ch. 4 ver. 6, *in his face*) *the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord;* not only that we may take the copy of His graces, but have a share of them.

There be many things that might be said of this spiritual growth, but I will add only a few.

First, in the judging of this growth, some persons conclude too rigidly against themselves, that they grow not by the word, because their growth is not so sensible to them as they desire. But, 1. It is well known, that in all things that grow, this growth is not discerned *in motu, sed in termino*,[31] not in the growing, but when they are grown. 2. Besides, other things are to be considered in this: although other graces seem not to advance, yet if you grow more self-denying and humble in the sense of your slowness, all is not lost; although the branches shoot not up so fast as you wish, yet, if the root grow deeper, and fasten more, it is a useful growth. He who is still learning to be more in Jesus Christ, and less in himself, to have all his dependence and comfort in Him, is doubtless a growing believer.

On the other side, a far greater number conclude wrong in their own favor, imagining that they do grow, if they gain ground in some of those things we mentioned above, namely, more knowledge and more faculty of discoursing; if they find often some present stirrings of joy or sorrow in hearing of the word; if they reform their life, grow more civil and blameless, &c.; yet all these and many such things may be in a natural man, who notwithstanding grows not, for that is impossible; he is not, in that state, a subject capable of this growth, for he is dead, he has none of the new life to which this growth relates. Herod heard gladly, and obeyed many things.[32]

Consider, then, what true delight we might have in this. You find a pleasure when you see your children grow, when they begin to stand and walk, and so forth; you love well to perceive your estate or your honor grow: but for the soul to be growing more like God, and nearer Heaven, if we know it, is a pleasure far beyond them all: to find pride, earthliness, and vanity abating, and faith, and love, and spiritual-mindedness increasing; especially if we reflect that this growth is not as our natural life, which is often cut off before it reaches full age, as we call it, and, if it attain that, falls again to move downwards, and decays, as the sun, being at its meridian, begins to decline again; but this life shall grow on in whomever it is, and come certainly to its fullness; after which, there is no more need for this word, either for growth or nourishment,—no death, no decay, no old age, but perpetual youth, and a perpetual spring; *ver aeternum;* fullness of joy in the presence of God, and everlasting pleasures at His right hand.[33]

1Pe 2:3

Ver. 3. If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Our natural desire for food arises principally from its necessity for that end which nature seeks, *viz.* the growth, or at least the nourishment of our bodies. But there is, besides, a present sweetness and pleasantness in the use of it that serves to sharpen our desire, and is placed in our nature for that purpose. Thus the children of God, in their spiritual life, are naturally carried to desire the means of their nourishment and of their growth, being always here in a growing state; but besides, there is a spiritual delight and sweetness in the word, in that which it reveals concerning God, and this adds to their desire, stirs up their appetite towards it. The former idea is expressed in the preceding verse, the latter in this. Nature sends the infant to the breast; but when it has once tasted of it, that is a new superadded attraction, and makes it desire after it the more earnestly. So here,

The word is fully recommended to us by these two, usefulness and pleasantness: like milk, (as it is compared here,) which is a nourishing food, and also sweet and delightful to the taste: by it we grow, and in it we taste the graciousness of God. David, in that Psalm which he dedicates wholly to this subject, gives both of these as the reason for his appetite. He passionately expresses his love for it (119:97-102), *O how love I your law!* It follows, that by it he was made wiser than his enemies,—than his teachers,—and than the ancients; taught to refrain from every evil way; taught by the Author of that word, the Lord Himself, to grow wiser and warier, and holier in his ways; and then, ver. 103, he adds this other reason, *How sweet are your words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

We shall speak, I. Of the goodness or graciousness of the Lord; II. Of this taste; and III. Of the inference from both.

I. The goodness of God: *The Lord is gracious;* or, of a bountiful, kind disposition. The Hebrew word in Psa 34:8, whence this is taken, signifies *good*. The Septuagint renders it by the same word as is used here by our Apostle. Both the words signify a benignity and kindness of nature. It is one of love's attributes,[34] that it is kind, *chresteuomai*, ever compassionate, and helpful as it can be in straits and distresses, and still ready to forget and pass by evil, and to do good. In the largest and most comprehensive sense must we take the expression here, and yet still we shall speak and think infinitely below what His goodness is. He is naturally good, yea, goodness is His nature; He is goodness and love itself. *He who loves not knows not God; for God is love*.[35] He is primitively good; all goodness is derived from Him, and all that is in the creature comes forth from none other than that ocean; and this Graciousness is still larger than them all.

There is a common bounty of God, in which He does good to all, and so *the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord*.[36] But the goodness that the Gospel is full of,—the particular stream that runs in that channel, is His peculiar graciousness and love to His own children, that by which they are first enlivened, and then refreshed and sustained in their spiritual being. It is this that is here spoken of. He is gracious to them in freely forgiving their sins, in giving no less than Himself to them; He frees them from all evils, and fills them with all good. He satisfies your mouth with good things and so it follows with good reason, that He is merciful and gracious; and His graciousness is further expressed in His gentleness and slowness to anger, His bearing with the frailties of His own, and pitying them *like as a father pities his children*.[37]

No friend is so kind and friendly (as this word signifies), and none so powerful. He is *a very present help in trouble*,[38] ready to be found: whereas others may be far off, He is always at hand, and His presence is always comfortable.

Those who know God, still find Him a real useful good. Some things and some persons are useful at one time, and others at another, but God at all times. A well-furnished table may please a man while he has health and appetite, but offer it to him in the height of a fever, how unpleasant would it be then! Though never so lavishly prepared, it is then not only useless, but hateful to him; but the kindness and love of God is then as seasonable and refreshing to him, as in health, and possibly more; he can find sweetness in that, even on his sickbed. The bitter choler abounding in the mouth, in a fever, does not make distasteful this sweetness; it transcends and goes above it. Thus all earthly enjoyments have but some time (as meats) when they are in season, but the graciousness of God is always sweet; the taste of that is never out of season. See how old age spoils the relish of outward delights, in the example of Barzillai,[39] but it makes not this distasteful. Therefore the Psalmist prays, that when other comforts forsake him and wear out, when they ebb from him and leave him on the sand, this may not; that still he may feed on the goodness of God: *Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength fails*.[40] It is the continual influence of His graciousness that makes them still grow like a *cedar in Lebanon*, that makes them *still bring forth fruit in old age, and be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright*, as it is there added, that He is (as the word imports) still like Himself, and His goodness is ever the same.[41]

Full chests or large possessions may seem sweet to a man, until death presents itself; but then (as the Prophet speaks of throwing away their idols of silver and gold to the bats and moles, in the day of calamity,[42]) then he is forced to throw away all he possesses, with disdain for it and for his former folly in doting on it—at that time, the kindness of friends, and wife, and children, can do nothing but increase his grief and their own—but then is the love of God the good indeed and abiding sweetness, and it best relishes when all other things are most unsavory and uncomfortable.

God is gracious, but it is God in Christ; otherwise we cannot find Him so: therefore this is here spoken in particular of Jesus Christ, (as it appears by that which follows,) through whom all the peculiar kindness and love of God is conveyed to the soul, for it can come no other way; and the word here mentioned is the Gospel,[43] of which Christ is the subject. Though God is mercy and goodness in Himself, yet we cannot find or apprehend Him so to us, but as we are looking through that *medium* the Mediator. That main point of the goodness of God in the Gospel, which is so sweet to a humbled sinner, the forgiveness of sins, we know we cannot taste of, but in Christ—*In whom we have redemption*.[44] And all the favor that shines upon us, all the grace that we receive, is *of his fullness*;[45] all our acceptance with God, our being taken into grace and kindness again, is in Him—*He has made us accepted in the beloved*.[46] His grace appears in both, as it is there expressed, but it is all in Christ. Let us therefore never leave Him out in our desires of tasting the graciousness and love of God; for otherwise we shall not only dishonor Him, but also disappoint ourselves.

The free grace of God was given to be tasted, in the promises, before the coming of Christ in the flesh; but being accomplished in His coming, then was the sweetness of grace made more sensible; then was it more fully broached, and let out to the elect world, when He was pierced on the cross, and His blood poured out for our redemption. Through those holes of His wounds may we draw, and taste that the Lord is gracious, says St. Augustine.

II. As to this taste: *You have tasted*.] There is a tasting exercised by temporary believers spoken of, Heb 6:4. Their highest sense of spiritual things, (and it will be far higher in some than we easily think,) yet is but a taste, and is called so in comparison of the truer, fuller sense that true believers have of the grace and goodness of God, which, compared with a temporary taste, is more than tasting. The former is merely tasting, rather an imaginary taste than real; but this is a true feeding on the graciousness of God, yet it is called but a taste in respect of the fullness to come. Though it is more than a taste, as distinguishable from the hypocrite's sense, yet it is no more than a taste, compared with the great marriage-feast that we look for.

Jesus Christ being *all in all*[47] to the soul, faith, apprehending Him, is all the spiritual senses: it is the eye that beholds His matchless beauty, and so kindles love in the soul, and can speak of Him as having seen Him, and taken particular notice of Him:[48] it is the ear that discerns His voice.[49] It is faith that smells His *name* as ointment poured forth;[50] faith that touches Him and draws virtue from Him; and faith that tastes Him;[51] and so here, *If you have tasted*.

In order to this there must be, 1. A firm believing of the truth of the promises in which the free grace of God is expressed and exhibited to us. 2. A particular application or attraction of that grace to ourselves, which is the drawing of those *breasts of her consolations*,[52] namely, the promises contained in the Old and New Testaments. 3. A sense of the sweetness of that grace, being applied or drawn into the soul, and that is properly this taste. No unrenewed man has any of these in truth, not the highest kind of temporary believer; he cannot have so much as a real lively assent to the general truth of the promises; for if he had that, the rest would follow. But as he cannot have the least of these in truth, he may have the counterfeit of them all, not only of assent but of application, yea, and a false spiritual joy arising from it; and all these so drawn to the life, that they may much resemble the truth of them. To give clear characters of difference is not so easy as most persons imagine; but doubtless the true living faith of a Christian has in itself such a particular stamp, as brings with it its own evidence, when the soul is clear, and the light of God's face shines upon it. Indeed, in the dark we cannot read, nor distinguish one mark from another; but when a Christian has light to look upon the work of God in his own soul, although he cannot make another sensible of that by which he knows it, yet he himself is assured, and can say confidently in himself, "This I know, that this faith and taste of God I have is true; the seal of the Spirit of God is upon it;" and this is the reading of that new name, in the white stone, which no man knows saving he that receives it.[53] There is, in a true believer, such a constant love to God for Himself, and such a continual desire after Him, simply for His own excellence and goodness, as no other can have. On the other side, if a hypocrite would deal truly and impartially by himself, he would readily find out something that would reveal him more or less to himself. But the truth is, men are willing to deceive themselves, and herein arises the difficulty. One man cannot make another sensible of the sweetness of Divine Grace: he may speak to him of it very excellently, but all he says in that kind is an unknown language to a natural man; he hears many good words, but he cannot tell what they mean. *The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned*.[54]

A spiritual man himself does not fully comprehend this sweetness that he tastes of; it is an infinite goodness, and he has but a taste of it. *The peace of God*, which is a main fruit of this His goodness, *passes all understanding*,[55] says the Apostle, not only all natural understanding, (as some modify it,) but all understanding, even the supernatural understanding of those who enjoy it. And as the godly man cannot comprehend it all, so as to that which he understands, he cannot express it all, and that which he does express, the carnal mind cannot conceive of by his expression.

But he who has indeed tasted of this goodness, O how tasteless are those things to him that the world calls sweet! As when you have tasted something that is very sweet, it disrelishes other things after it. Therefore a Christian can so easily either lack, or use with indifference the delights of this earth. His heart is not upon them: for the delight that he finds in God carries it unspeakably away from all the rest, and makes them in comparison seem sapless to his taste.

Solomon tasted of all the delicacies, the choicest dishes that are in such esteem amongst men, and not only tasted, but ate largely of them, and yet see how he goes over them, to let us know what they are, and passes from one dish to another. *This also is vanity*, and of the next, *This also is vanity*, and so through all, and of all in general, *All is vanity and vexation of spirit*, or feeding on the wind, as the word may be rendered.[56]

III. We come in the third place to the inference: *If you have tasted*, &c., then *lay aside all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking*, ver. 1; for it looks back to the whole exhortation. Surely, if you have tasted of that kindness and sweetness of God in Christ, it will compose your spirits, and conform them to Him; it will diffuse such a sweetness through your soul, that there will be no place for *malice and guile;* there will be nothing but love, and meekness, and singleness of heart. Therefore those who have bitter malicious spirits, prove that they have not tasted of the love of God. As the Lord is good, so those who taste of His goodness are made like Him. *Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you*.[57]

Again, if you have tasted, then desire more. And this will be the truest sign of it: he who is in a continual hunger and thirst after this graciousness of God has surely tasted of it. *My soul thirsts for God*, says David. He had tasted before; he remembers, that he *went to the house of God, with the voice of joy*.[58]

This is that happy circle in which the soul moves: the more they love it, the more they shall taste of this goodness; and the more they taste, the more they shall still love and desire it.

But observe, *if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious*, then, *desire the milk of the word*. This is the sweetness of the *word*, that it has in it the Lord's graciousness, and gives us the knowledge of His love. Those who have spiritual life and senses find this in it, and those senses are exercised to discern good and evil; and this engages a Christian to further desire of the word. They are fantastical deluding tastes, which draw men from the written word, and make them expect other revelations. This graciousness is first conveyed to us by the *word;* there first we taste it, and therefore there still we are to seek it; to hang upon those breasts that cannot be drawn dry; there the love of God in Christ streams forth in the several promises. The heart that cleaves to the word of God, and delights in it, cannot but find in it, daily, new tastes of His goodness; there it reads His love, and by that stirs up its own to Him, and so grows and loves, every day more than the former, and thus is tending from tastes to fullness. It is but little we can receive here, some drops of joy that enter into us; but there we shall enter into joy, as vessels put into a sea of happiness.

÷1Pe 2:4-5

Ver. 4. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

Ver. 5. You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

The spring of all the dignities of a Christian, and therefore the great motive of all his duties, is his near relation to Jesus Christ. There it is, that the Apostle makes that the great subject of his doctrine, both to represent to his distressed brethren their dignity in that respect, and to press by it the necessary duties he exhorts to. Having spoken of their spiritual life and growth in Him, under the resemblance of natural life, he prosecutes it here by another comparison very frequent in the Scriptures, and therefore makes use in it of some passages of those Scriptures, that were prophetical of Christ and His Church. Though there be here two different similitudes, yet they have so near a relation one to another, and meet so well in the same subject, that he joins them together, and then illustrates them severally in the following verses; a *temple*, and a *priesthood*, comparing the Saints to both: the former in these words of this verse.

We have in it, 1. The nature of the building: 2. The materials of it: 3. The structure or way of building it.

1. The *nature* of it; it is *a spiritual building*. Time and place, we know, received their being from God, and He was eternally before both; He is therefore styled by the Prophet, *The high and lofty One who inhabits eternity*.[59] But having made the world, He fills it, though not as contained in it, and so the whole frame of it is His palace or temple, but after a more special manner, the higher and statelier part of it, the highest Heaven; therefore it is called His holy place, and the habitation of His holiness and glory.[60] And on earth, the houses of His public worship are called His houses; especially the Jewish temple in its time, having in it such a relative typical holiness, which others have not. But besides all these, and beyond them all in excellence, He has a house in which He dwells more peculiarly than in any of the rest, even more than in Heaven, taken for the place only, and that is this *spiritual building*. And this is most suitable to the nature of God. As our Savior says of the necessary conformity of His worship to Himself, *God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*,[61] so it holds of His house; He must have a spiritual one, because He is a Spirit; so God's temple is His people.

And for this purpose chiefly did He make the world, the heaven, and the earth, that in it He might raise this spiritual building for Himself to dwell in forever, to have a number of His reasonable creatures to enjoy Him, and glorify Him in eternity. And from that eternity He knew what the dimensions, and frame, and materials of it should be. The continuation of this present world, as it now is, is but for the service of this work, like the scaffolding about it; and therefore, when this spiritual building shall be fully completed, all the present frame of things in the world, and in the Church itself, shall be taken away, and appear no more.

This building is, as the particular designation of its materials will teach us, the whole invisible Church of God, and each good man is a stone of this building. But as the nature of it is spiritual, it has this privilege (as they speak of the soul), that it is *Tota in toto, et tota in qualibet parte:*[62] the whole Church is the spouse of Christ, and each believing soul has the same title and dignity to be called so: thus each of these stones is called a whole temple, *the temple of the Holy Ghost*;[63] though taking the Temple or Building in a more complete sense, each one is but a part, or a stone of it, as it is here expressed.

The whole excellence of this building is comprised in this, that it is spiritual, distinguishing it from all other buildings, and preferring it above them. And inasmuch as the Apostle speaks immediately after of a priesthood and sacrifices, it seems to be called a spiritual building, particularly in opposition to that material temple in which the Jews gloried, which was now null, regarding its former use, and was quickly after entirely destroyed. But while it stood, and the legal use of it stood in its fullest vigor, yet in this respect still it was inferior, that it was not a *spiritual house* made up of *living stones*, as this, but of a similar matter with other earthly buildings.

This spiritual house is the palace of the Great King, or His temple. The Hebrew word for palace and temple is one. God's temple is a palace, and therefore must be full of the richest beauty and magnificence, but such as agrees with the nature of it, a spiritual beauty. In that Psalm which wishes so many prosperities, one is, that *our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace*.[64] Thus is the Church: she is called the King's daughter; but her comeliness is invisible to the world, *she is all glorious within*.[65] Through sorrows and persecutions, she may be smoky and black, to the world's eye, as the *tents of Kedar*;[66] but as to spiritual beauty, she is comely *as the curtains of Solomon*.[67] And in this the Jewish temple resembles it rightly, which had most of its riches and beauty on the inside. Holiness is the gold of this spiritual house, and it is inwardly enriched with that.

The glory of the Church of God consists not in stately buildings of temples, and rich furniture, and pompous ceremonies; these agree not with its spiritual nature. Its true and genuine beauty is, to grow in spirituality, and so to be more like itself, and to have more of the presence of God, and His glory filling it as a cloud. And it has been observed, that the more the Church grew in outward riches and state, the less she grew, or rather the more sensibly she abated, in spiritual excellences. But the spirituality of this building will better appear in considering particularly,

2ndly, The *materials* of it, as here expressed *To whom coming, &c., you also, as lively stones, are, &c.* Now the whole building is Christ mystical, Christ together with the entire body of the elect: He, as the foundation, and they as the stones built upon Him; He, the living stone, and they likewise, by union with Him, living stones; He, *having life in himself*, as He speaks,[68] and they deriving it from Him; He, primitively living, and they, by participation. For therefore is He called here a *living stone*, not only because of His immortality and glorious resurrection, being a Lamb that was slain and is alive again forever,[69] but because He is the principle of spiritual and eternal life to us, a living foundation that transfuses this life into the whole building, and every stone of it, *In whom* (says the Apostle) *all the building fitly framed together grows unto a holy temple in the Lord*.[70] It is the Spirit that flows from Him, which enlivens it, and knits it together, as a living body; for the same word is used, Eph 4:16, for the Church under the similitude of a body. When it is said, Ch. 20, to be *built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets*, it only refers to their doctrine concerning Christ; and therefore it is added, that He, as being the subject of their doctrine, is the *chief corner-stone*. The foundation, then, of the Church, lies not in Rome, but in Heaven, and therefore is out of the reach of all enemies, and above the power of the gates of hell. Fear not, then, when you see the storms arise, and the winds blow against this spiritual building, for it shall stand; it is built upon an invisible, immoveable Rock; and that great Babylon, Rome itself, that, under the false title and pretence of supporting this building, is working to overthrow it, shall be utterly overthrown, and laid equal with the ground, and never be rebuilt again.

But this *Foundation-stone*, as it is commended by its quality, that it is a *living* and enlivening stone, having life, and giving life to those who are built on it, so it is also further described by God's choosing it, and by its own worth; in both opposed to men's disesteem, and therefore it is said here to be *chosen of God and precious*. God did indeed from eternity contrive this building, and choose this same foundation, and accordingly, in the fullness of time, did perform His purpose; so the thing being one, we may take it either for His purpose, or the performance of it, or both; yet it seems most suitable to the strain of the words, and to the place after alleged, in respect to laying Him in Sion, and opposing the rejection of men, that we take it for God's actual employing of Jesus Christ in the work of our redemption. He alone was fit for that work; it was utterly impossible that any other should bear the weight of that service, and so of this building, but He who was Almighty. Therefore the Spouse calls Him *the chiefest, or choice among ten thousand*,[71] yet He was *rejected of men*.[72] There is an antipathy (if we may so speak) between the mind of God and corrupt nature; the things that are highly esteemed with men are an abomination to God; and thus we see here, that which is highly esteemed with God, is cast out and disallowed by men. But surely there is no comparison; the choosing and esteem of God stands; and by that (judge men of Christ as they will) He is the foundation of this building. And He is in true value answerable to this esteem: He is precious; which seems to signify a kind of inward worth, hidden from the eyes of men, blind and unbelieving men, but well known to God, and to those to whom He reveals Him. And this is the very cause of His rejection by the most, the ignorance of His worth and excellence; as a precious stone that the skilful lapidary esteems of much worth, an ignorant beholder makes little or no account of.

These things hold likewise in the other stones of this building; they, too, are *chosen* before time; all that should be of this building, fore-ordained in God's purpose, all written in that book beforehand; and then, in due time, they are chosen by actual calling, according to that purpose, hewed out and severed by God's own hand, out of the quarry of corrupt nature: dead stones in themselves, as the rest, but made living, by His bringing them to Christ, and so made truly *precious*, and accounted precious by Him who has made them so. All the stones in this building are called God's jewels.[73] Though they be vilified, and scoffed at, and despised by men, though they pass for fools, and the refuse of the world, yet they may easily digest all that, in the comfort of this, if they are chosen of God, and precious in His eyes. This is the very lot of Christ, and therefore by that the more welcome, that it conforms them to Him,—suits these stones to their foundation.

And if we consider it rightly, what a poor despicable thing is the esteem of men! How soon is it past! *It is a very small thing*, says the Apostle Paul, *that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment*.[74] Now that God often chooses for this building such stones as men cast away as good for nothing, see 1Co 1:26. And where He says, *I dwell in the high and holy place*,[75] what is His other dwelling, His habitation on earth? is it in great palaces and courts? No; but *with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit*. Now, these are the basest in men's account: yet He chooses them, and prefers them to all other palaces and temples. *Thus says the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things has my hand made, and all those things have been, says the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word*.[76] You cannot gratify me with any dwelling, for I myself have made all, and a surer house than any that you can make me, *The heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool:* but I, who am so high, am pleased to regard the lowly.

3rdly, We have the *structure*, or way of building. *To whom coming*.] First, *coming*, then *built up.* Those who come to Christ, come not only from the world that lies in wickedness,[77] but out of themselves. Of a great many that seem to come to Christ, it may be said, that they have not come to Him, because they have not left themselves. This is believing on Him, which is the very resigning of the soul to Christ, and living by Him. *You will not come to me, that you might have life*,[78] says Christ. He complains of it as a wrong done to Him; but the loss is ours. It is His glory to give us life who were dead; but it is our happiness to receive that life from Him. Now these stones come unto their foundation; which imports the moving of the soul to Christ, being moved by His Spirit, and that the will acts, and willingly (for it cannot act otherwise), but still as being actuated and drawn by the Father. *No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him*.[79] And the outward means of drawing is by the word; it is the sound of that harp, which brings the stones of this spiritual building together. And then, being united to Christ, they are built up; that is, as St. Paul expresses it, they grow up unto a holy temple in the Lord.[80]

In times of peace, the Church may expand more, and build as it were into breadth, but in times of trouble, it arises more in height; it is then built upwards: as in cities where men are straitened, they build usually higher than in the country. Notwithstanding the Church's afflictions, yet still the building is going forward; it is built, as Daniel speaks of Jerusalem, *in troublous times*.[81] And it is this which the Apostle intends, as suiting with his foregoing exhortation: this passage may be read exhortatively too; but taking it rather as asserting their condition, it is for this purpose, that they may remember to be like it, and grow up. For this end he expressly calls them *living stones;* an adjunct not usual for stones, but here inseparable; and therefore, though the Apostle changes the similitude from infants to stones; yet he will not let go this quality of living, as making chiefly for his purpose.

To teach us the necessity of growth in believers, they are therefore often compared to things that grow, to trees planted in fruitful growing places, as *by the rivers of water*,[82] to cedars in Lebanon,[83] where they are tallest; to *the morning light;* to infants on the breast; and here, where the word seems to refuse it, to *stones;* yet (it must, and well does admit this unwonted epithet) they are called *living* and *growing stones*.

If, then, you would have the comfortable persuasion of this union with Christ, see whether you find your souls established upon Jesus Christ, finding Him as your strong foundation; not resting on yourselves, nor on any other thing either within you or without you, but supported by Him alone: drawing life from Him, by virtue of that union, as from a living foundation, so as to say with the Apostle, *I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*.[84]

As these stones are built on Christ by faith, so they are cemented one to another by love; and, therefore, where that is not, it is but a delusion for persons to think themselves parts of this building. As it is knit to Him, it is knit together in itself through Him; and if dead stones in a building support and mutually strengthen one another, how much more ought *living stones* in an active, lively way so to do! The stones of this building keep their place; the lower rise not up to be in the place of the higher. As the Apostle speaks of the parts of the body, so the stones of this building in humility and love keep their station, and grow up in it, *unto the edifying of itself in love;*[85] the Apostle importing, that the lack of this much prejudices edification.

These stones, because they are living, therefore grow in the life of grace and spirituality, being a *spiritual building;* so that if we find not this, but our hearts are still carnal, and glued to the earth, minding *earthly things*,[86] wiser in those than in spirituals, this evidences strongly against us, that we are not of this building. How few of us have that spirituality that becomes the temples of the Holy Ghost, or the stones of that building! Base lusts are still lodging and ruling within us, and so our hearts are as cages of unclean birds and filthy spirits.

Consider this as your happiness, to form part of this building, and consider the instability of other comforts and privileges. If some have called those stones happy, that were taken for the building of temples or altars, beyond those in common houses, how true is it here! Happy indeed the stones that God chooses to be living stones in this spiritual temple, though they be hammered and hewed to be polished for it, by afflictions and the inward work of mortification and repentance. It is worth enduring all, to be fitted for this building. They are happy, beyond all the rest of men, though they might never be set in such great honors, as prime parts of political buildings, (states and kingdoms), in the courts of kings, yea, or kings themselves. For all other buildings, and all the parts of them, shall be demolished and come to nothing, from the foundation to the cope-stone: all your houses, both cottages and palaces; *the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up;* as our Apostle has it.[87] But this spiritual building shall grow up to Heaven; and being come to perfection, shall abide forever in perfection of beauty and glory. In it shall be found no unclean thing, nor unclean person, but only those *who are written in the Lamb's book of life*.[88]

A holy priesthood.] For the worship and ceremonies of the Jewish church were all shadows of Jesus Christ, and have their accomplishment in Him, not only after a singular manner in His own person, but in a derived way, in His mystical body, His Church. The priesthood of the Law represented Him as the great High Priest who offered Himself up for our sins, and that is a priesthood altogether incommunicable; neither is there any peculiar office of priesthood for offering sacrifice in the Christian Church, but His alone who is head of it. But this dignity that is here mentioned, of *a holy priesthood*, offering up *spiritual sacrifices,* is common to all those who are in Christ. As they are living stones built on Him into a spiritual temple, so they are priests of that same temple made by Him.[89] As He was after a transcendent manner, temple, and priest, and sacrifice, so, in their kind, are Christians all these three through Him; and by His Spirit that is in them, their offerings through Him are made acceptable.

We have here, 1. The office; 2. The service of that office; 3. The success of that service.

1. The Office. The death of Jesus Christ, as being every way powerful for reconciliation and union, not only broke down the partition-wall of guiltiness that stood between God and man, but also the wall of ceremonies that stood between the Jews and the Gentiles: it made all who believe one with God, *and made both one*,[90] as the Apostle speaks—united them one to another. The way of salvation was made known, not to one nation only, but to all people: so that whereas the knowledge of God was before confined to one little corner, it is now diffused through the nations; and whereas the dignity of their priesthood stayed in a few persons, all those who believe are now thus dignified to be priests unto God the Father. And this was signified by the rending of the veil of the Temple at His death; not only that those ceremonies and sacrifices were to cease, as being all fulfilled in Him, but that the people of God who were before by that veil held out in the outer court, were to be admitted into the Holy Place, as being all of them priests, and fitted to offer sacrifices.

The priesthood of the Law was holy, and its holiness was signified by many outward things suitable to their manner, by anointings, and washings, and vestments; but in this spiritual priesthood of the Gospel, holiness itself is instead of all those, as being the substance of all. The children of God are all anointed, and purified, and clothed with holiness. But then,

2. There is here the service of this office, namely, *to offer*. There is no priesthood without sacrifice, for these terms are correlative, and offering sacrifices was the chief employment of the legal priests. Now, because the priesthood here spoken of is altogether spiritual, therefore the sacrifices must be so too, as the Apostle here expresses it.

We are saved the pains and cost of bringing bullocks and rams, and other such sacrifices; and these are in their stead. As the Apostle speaks of the high priesthood of Christ, that *the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law;*[91] so, in this priesthood of Christians, there is a change of the kind of sacrifice from the other. All sacrifice is not taken away, but it is changed from the offering of those things formerly in use to spiritual sacrifices.

Now these are preferable in every way; they are easier and cheaper to us, and yet more precious and acceptable to God; as it follows here in the text. Even during the time when the other sacrifices were in request, these spiritual offerings always had the precedence in God's account, and without them He hated and despised all burnt-offerings and the largest sacrifices, though they were then according to His own appointment. How much more should we abound in spiritual sacrifice, who are eased of the other! How much more applies that answer now, which was given even in those times to the inquiry, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?* &c., You need not all that trouble and expense, *thousands of rams*, &c.—that which God requires most of all is at hand, namely, *to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God*.[92] So, Psa 50:23 : *Whoever offers praise, glorifies me.* That which is peculiarly spoken of Christ, applies to Christians by conformity with Him.

But though the spiritual sacrificing is easier in its own nature, yet to the corrupt nature of man it is by far the harder. He would rather choose still all the toil and cost of the former way, if it were in his option. This was the sin of the Jews in those times, that they leaned the soul upon the body's service too much, and would have done enough of that to be dispensed from this spiritual service. Hence are the Lord's frequent reproofs and complaints of this, Psa 50:1-23, Isa 1:1-31, &c. Hence the willingness in Popery for outward work, for penances and satisfactions of bodies and purses,—anything of that kind, if it might serve,—rather than the inward work of repentance and mortification, the spiritual service and sacrifices of the soul. But the answer to all those from God is that of the Prophet, *Who has required this at your hand?*[93]

Indeed, the sacred writers press works of charity, if they be done with a right hand, and the left hand not so much as acquainted with the business, as our Savior speaks, *Let not your left hand know what your right hand does*.[94] They must be done with a right and single intention, and from a right principle moving to them, without any vain opinion of meriting by them with God, or any vain desire of gaining applause with men, but merely out of love to God, and to man for His sake. Thus they are one of these spiritual sacrifices, and therefore ought by no means to be neglected by Christian priests, that is, by any who are Christians.

Another spiritual sacrifice is, *the prayers of the saints:*[95] *Let my prayer be set forth before you as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice*.[96] It is not the composition of prayer, or the eloquence of expression, that is the sweetness of it in God's account, and makes it a sacrifice of a pleasing smell or sweet odor to Him; but the breathing forth of the desire of the heart; that is what makes it a spiritual sacrifice, otherwise, it is as carnal, and dead, and worthless in God's account, as the carcasses of beasts. Incense can neither smell nor ascend without fire; no more does prayer, unless it arises from a bent of spiritual affection; it is that which both makes it smell, and sends it heavenwards, makes it never stop moving upwards until it comes before God, and smells sweet in His nostrils, which few, too few, of our prayers do.

Praise also is a *sacrifice;* to make respectful and honorable mention of the Name of God, and of His goodness; to bless Him humbly and heartily. *Offer unto God thanksgiving. Whoever offers praise, glorifies me*.[97] And this is that sacrifice that shall never end, but continues in Heaven to eternity.

Then, *a holy course of life* is called the *sacrifice of righteousness*, Psa 4:5. So also Heb 13:16, where the Apostle shows what sacrifices replace those which, as he has taught at large, are abolished. Christ sacrificed for us, and that alone was powerful to take away sin: but our gratulatory sacrifices, praise and alms, are as incense burnt to God, of which as the standers-by find the sweet smell, so the holy life of Christians smells sweet to those with whom they live. But the wicked, as putrefied carcasses, are of a noxious smell to God and man. *They are corrupt, they have done abominable works*.[98]

In a word, that sacrifice of ours which includes all these, and without which none of these can be rightly offered, is *ourselves*, our whole selves. Our *bodies* are to be presented *a living sacrifice*,[99] and they are not that without our souls. It is our heart given, that gives all the rest, for that commands all. *My son, give me your heart*,[100] and then the other will follow, your eyes will delight in my ways. This makes the eyes, ears, tongue, and hands, and all, to be holy, as God's peculiar property; and being once given and consecrated to Him, it becomes sacrilege to turn them to any unholy use. This makes a man delight to hear and speak of things that concern God, and to think on Him frequently, to be holy in his secret thoughts, and in all his ways. In ever thing we bring Him, every thanksgiving and prayer we offer, His eye is upon the heart—He looks for it along with our offering, and if He doesn't see it, He cares not for all the rest, but throws it back again.

The heart must be offered too, and the whole heart, all of it entirely given to Him. *Se totem obtulit Christus pro nobis*—Christ offered up His whole self for us. In another sense, which contradicts not this, your heart must not be whole, but *broken*.[101] But if you find it unbroken, yet give it to Him, with a desire that it may be broken. And if it is broken, and if, when you have given it Him, He breaks it more, yes and melts it too, yet you shall not repent your gift; for He breaks and melts it, that He may refine it, and make it up a new and excellent frame, and may impress His own image on it, and make it holy, and so like to Himself.

Let us then give Him ourselves, or nothing; and to give ourselves to Him, is not His advantage, but ours. As the philosopher said to his poor scholar, who, when others gave him great gifts, told him, he had nothing but himself to give: It is well, said he, and I will endeavor to give you back to yourself, better than I received you;—thus does God with us, and thus does a Christian make himself his daily sacrifice: he renews this gift of himself every day to God, and receiving it every day bettered again, still he has the more delight in giving it, as being more fit for God, the more it is sanctified by former sacrificing.

Now that, by which we offer all other spiritual sacrifices, and ourselves withal, is love. That is the holy fire that burns up all, sends up our prayers, and our hearts, and our whole selves a whole burnt-offering to God; and, as the fire of the altar, it is originally from Heaven, being kindled by God's own love to us; and by this the Church, and each believer, ascends like *pillars of smoke*, (as the word is, Son 3:6,) going even up to God *perfumed with myrrh and frankincense*, all the graces of the Spirit received from Christ, but above all, with His own merits.

How far from this are most of us, though professing to be Christians? Who considers his holy calling? As the peculiar holiness of the ministry should be much in the eyes and thoughts of those who are called to it, as they should study to be answerably eminent in holiness, so, all you who are Christians, consider, you are priests unto God; being called a *holy priesthood*, thus you ought to be. But if we speak what we are indeed, we must say rather, we are an unholy priesthood, a shame to that name and holy profession. Instead of the sacrifice of a godly life, and the incense of prayer and praise, in families and alone, what is there with many, but the filthy vapors and profane speaking and a profane life, as a noxious smell arising out of a dunghill?

But you who have once offered up yourselves unto God, and are still doing so with all the services you can reach, continue so, and be assured, that however unworthy yourselves and all your offerings are, yet they shall not be rejected.

3. The third thing here observable is, the success of that service; *Acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*.[102] The children of God delight in offering sacrifices to Him; but if they didn't know that they were well taken at their hands, this would discourage them much—therefore this is added. How often do the godly find it in their sweet experience, that when they come to pray, He welcomes them, and gives them such evidences of His love, as they would not exchange for all worldly pleasures! And when this does not so presently appear at other times, yet they ought to believe it. He accepts them and their ways offered in sincerity, although never so inferior: though they sometimes have no more than a sigh or a groan, it is most properly a spiritual sacrifice.

Stay not away because you, and the gifts you offer, are inferior to the offering of others. No, none are excluded for that; only give what you have, and act with affection, for that He regards most. Under the law, those who didn't have a lamb, were welcome with a pair of pigeons. So the Christian may say—What I am, Lord, I offer myself unto You, to be wholly Yours; and if I had a thousand times more outward or inward gifts, all should be Yours; if I had more estate, or wit, or learning, or power, I would endeavor to serve You with all. What I have, I offer You, and it is most truly Yours; it is but of Your own that I give You.—No one needs to forgo sacrifice because of poverty, for what God desires is the heart, and there is none so poor but has a heart to give Him.

But meanness is not all; there is a guiltiness on ourselves and on all we offer; our prayers and services are all polluted. But this doesn't hinder either; for our acceptance is not for ourselves, but for the sake of One who has no guiltiness at all: *Acceptable by Jesus Christ*. In Him our persons are clothed with righteousness, and in His clothing we are, as Isaac said to Jacob in his brother's garments, *as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed*.[103] And all our other sacrifices, our prayers and services, if we offer them by Him,[104] and put them into His hand to offer to the Father, then doubt not they will be accepted in Him; for this *by Jesus Christ*, is relative both to our offering and our acceptance. We ought not to offer anything but *by Him;* and so we are well-pleasing to the Father, for He is His well-beloved Son, in whom His soul is delighted; not only delighted and pleased with Himself, but *in Him* with all things and persons that appear in Him, and are presented by Him.

And this alone answers all our doubts. For we ourselves, as little as we see that way, yet may see so much in our best services, so many wanderings in prayer, so much deadness, &c., as would make us still doubtful of acceptance: so that we might say with Job, *If I had called and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice*,[105] were it not for this, that our prayers and all our sacrifices pass through Christ's hand. He is that Angel who has much sweet odors, to mingle with the prayers of the saints.[106] He purifies them with His own merits and intercession, and so makes them pleasing to the Father. How ought our hearts to be knit to Him, by whom we are brought into favor with God, and kept in favor with Him; in whom we obtain all the good we receive, and in whom all we offer is accepted! In Him are all our supplies of grace, and our hopes of glory.

1Pe 2:6

Ver. 6. Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and he who believes on him shall not be confounded.

That which is the chief of the works of God, is therefore very reasonably the chief subject of His word, as both most excellent in itself, and of most concern for us to know; and this is the saving of lost mankind by His Son. Therefore is His name as precious ointment, or perfume, diffused through the whole Scripture—all these holy leaves smell of it, not only those that were written after His coming, but those that were written before. *Search the Scriptures*, says He Himself, *for they are they which testify of me;*[107] namely, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which were alone then written; and to evidence this, both Himself and His Apostles make so frequent use of their testimony, and we find so much of them inserted in the New, as being both one in substance; their lines meeting in the same Jesus Christ as their center.

The Apostle having, in the preceding verse, expressed the happy state and dignity of Christians, under the double notion, 1. of a spiritual house or temple, 2. of a spiritual priesthood,—here amplifies and confirms both from the writings of the prophets; the former, verses 6, 7, 8; the latter, verse 9. The places that he cites concerning this building are most pertinent, for they have clearly in them all that he spoke of it, both concerning the foundation and the edifice; as the first in these words of Isaiah, *Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone*, &c.[108]

Let this commend the Scriptures much to our diligence and affection, that their great theme is our Redeemer, and redemption wrought by Him; that they contain the doctrine of His excellences—are the lively picture of His matchless beauty. Were we more in them, we should daily see more of Him in them, and so of necessity love Him more. But we must look within them; the letter is but the case; the spiritual sense is what we should desire to see. We usually hurry them over, and see no further than their outside, and therefore find so little sweetness in them: we read them, but we search them not as He requires. Would we dig into those golden mines, we should find treasures of comfort that cannot be spent, but which would furnish us in the hardest times.

The prophecy here cited, if we look upon it in its own place, we shall find inserted in the middle of a very sad denunciation of judgment against the Jews. And this is usual with the Prophets, particularly, with this Evangelical Prophet Isaiah, to uphold the spirits of the godly, in the worst times, with this one great consolation, the promise of the Messiah, as weighing down all, both temporal distresses and deliverances. Hence are those sudden ascents, so frequent in the Prophets, from their present subject to this great *Hope of Israel*. And if this expectation of a Savior was so pertinent a comfort in all estates, so many ages before the accomplishment of it, how wrongfully do we undervalue it, being accomplished, who cannot live upon it, and answer all with it, and sweeten all our griefs, with this advantage, that there is *a foundation-stone laid in Sion*, on which those who are built shall surely not be ashamed!

In these words there are five things, 1. This Foundation-stone; 2. The laying of it; 3. The building on it; 4. The firmness of this building; And 5. The greatness and excellence of the work.

1st. For the *Foundation*, called here, a *chief corner-stone*. Though the Prophet's words are not precisely rendered, yet the substance and sense of them are the same. In Isaiah, chap. 28:16, both the *foundation* and *corner-stone* are expressed, the corner-stone in the foundation being the main support of the building, and throughout, the corner-stones uniting and knitting the building together; and therefore this same word, *a corner*, is frequently taken in Scripture for princes, or heads of people,[109] because good governors and government are that which upholds and unites the societies of people in states or kingdoms as one building. And Jesus Christ is indeed the only Head and King of His Church, who gives it laws, and rules it in wisdom and righteousness: the only Rock on which His Church is built; not Peter, (if we will believe St. Peter himself, as here he teaches us,) much less his pretended successors; He is the foundation and corner-stone that knits together the walls of Jews and Gentiles, *who has made both one*,[110] as St. Paul speaks, and unites the whole number of believers into one everlasting temple, and bears the weight of the whole fabric.

Elected.] Or chosen out for the purpose, and altogether fit for it. Isaiah has it, *a stone of trial*, or *a tried-stone*.[111] As things amongst men are best chosen after trial, so Jesus Christ was certainly known by the Father as most fit for that work to which He chose Him before He tried Him, as after, upon trial in His life, and death, and resurrection, He proved fully answerable to His Father's purpose in all that was appointed Him.

All the combined strength of angels had not sufficed for that business; but the wise Architect of this building knew both what it would cost, and what a foundation was necessary to bear so great and so lasting a structure as He intended. Sin having defaced and demolished the first building of man in the integrity of His creation, it was God's design, out of the very ruins of fallen man, to raise a more lasting edifice than the former, one that should not be subject to decay; and therefore He fitted for it a Foundation that might be everlasting. The sure founding, is the main thing; therefore, that it might stand for the true honor of His Majesty, (which Nebuchadnezzar vainly boasted of his Babel), He chose His own Son, *made flesh*. He was God, that He might be a strong foundation; He was Man, so that He might be suitable to the nature of the stones of which the building was to consist, that they might join and cement together.

Precious.] Inestimably precious, by all the conditions that can give worth to any; by rareness, and by inward excellence, and by useful virtues. Rare He is, without a doubt; there is not such a person in the world again; therefore He is called by the same Prophet, *Wonderful*,[112] full of wonders: the power of God and the frailty of man dwelling together in His person; *The Ancient of days*[113] becoming an infant; He who *stretched out the heavens*,[114] bound up in swaddling clothes in His infancy, and in His full age stretched forth on the cross; altogether spotless and innocent, and yet suffering not only the unjust cruelties of men, but the just wrath of God His Father: *the Lord of life*, and yet dying. His excellence appears in the same things, in that He is the Lord of life, God blessed forever, equal with the Father: the sparkling brightness of this precious stone is no less than this, that He is *the brightness* of the Father's *glory:*[115] so bright, that men could not have beheld Him appearing in Himself; therefore He veiled it with our flesh; and yet, through that it shined and sparkled so, that the Apostle St. John says of himself and of those others who had their eyes opened, and looked right upon Him, He *dwelt amongst us*, and He had a tent like ours, and yet, through that *we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*,[116]—the Deity filling His human nature with all manner of grace in its highest perfection. And Christ is not only thus excellent in Himself, but of precious virtue, which He lets forth and imparts to others; of such virtue that a touch of Him is the only cure of spiritual diseases. Men tell of strange virtues of some stones; but it is certain that this Precious Stone has not only virtue to heal the sick, but even to raise the dead. Dead bodies He raised in the days of His abode on earth, and dead souls He still raises by the power of His word. The Prophet Malachi calls Him *the Sun of righteousness*,[117] which includes in it the rareness and excellence we speak of—He is singular; as there is but one Sun in the world, so but one Savior: and His luster is such a stone as outshines the sun in its fullest brightness. And then, for his useful virtue, the Prophet adds, *with healing in his wings*. His worth is unspeakable, and remains infinitely beyond all these resemblances.

2ndly. There is here *the laying* of this Foundation: it is said to be laid in *Sion;* that is, it is laid in the Church of God. And it was first laid in *Sion*, literally, that being then the seat of the Church and of the true religion—He was laid there, in His manifestation in the flesh, and suffering and dying, and rising again; and afterwards, being preached through the world, He became the foundation of His Church in all places where His name was received; and so was a stone growing great, till it *filled the whole earth*, as Daniel has it.[118]

He says, *I lay;* by which the Lord expresses this to be His own proper work, as the Psalmist speaks of the same subject, *This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes*.[119] So Isaiah, speaking of this promised Messiah, *The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this*.[120]

And it is not only said, *I lay;* because He had the first thought of this great work,—the model of it was in His mind from eternity, and the accomplishment of it was by His Almighty power in the morning of His Son's birth, and His life and death and resurrection,—but also to signify the freeness of His grace, in giving His Son to be a foundation of happiness to man, without the least motion from man, or motive in man to draw Him to it. And this seems to be signified by the unexpected inserting of these Prophetical promises of the Messiah, in the midst of complaints of the people's wickedness, and threatening them with punishment; to intimate that there is no connection between this work and anything on man's part to procure it. Although you do thus provoke me to destroy you, yet, of myself, I have other thoughts; there is another purpose in my mind. And it is observable to this purpose, that that clearest promise of the virgin's Son is given, not only not required, but being refused by that profane king Ahaz.[121]

This again, that the Lord Himself is the Layer of this Corner-stone, teaches us the firmness of it; which is likewise expressed in the Prophet's words, very emphatically, by redoubling the same word, *Musad, Musad; fundamentum, fundamentum*—Foundation.

So, *I have set my king upon my holy hill of Sion:*[122]—who then, shall dethrone Him? I have given Him the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession:[123] and who will hinder Him to take possession of His right? If any offer to do so, what shall they be, but a number of earthen vessels fighting against an iron scepter, and so certainly breaking themselves in pieces? Thus here, *I lay this foundation stone;* and if I lay it, who shall remove it? and what I build upon it, who shall be able to cast down? For it is the glory of this great Master-builder, that the whole fabric which is of His building cannot be ruined; and for that end has He laid an immoveable foundation; and for that end are we taught and reminded of its firmness, so that we may have this confidence concerning the Church of God that is built upon it. To the eye of nature, the Church seems to have no foundation; as Job speaks of the earth, that it is hung upon nothing,[124] and yet as the earth remains firm, being established in its place by the word and power of God, the Church is most firmly founded upon the *Word made flesh*—Jesus Christ, as its *chief corner-stone*. And as all the winds that blow cannot remove the earth out of its place, neither can all the attempts of men, no, nor of the gates of hell, prevail against the Church.[125] It may be beaten with very boisterous storms, but it cannot fall, because it is founded upon this rock.[126] Thus it is with the whole house, and thus with every stone in it; as here it follows, *He who believes on him shall not be confounded*.

3rdly. There is, next, the building on this foundation. To be built on Christ is plainly to believe in Him. But in this most people deceive themselves; they hear of such privileges and happiness in Christ, and presently imagine it is all theirs, without any more ado; as that madman of Athens, who wrote up all the ships that came into the haven for his own. We consider not what it is to believe in Him, nor what is the necessity of this believing, in order that we may be partakers of the salvation that He has wrought. It is not those who have heard of Him, or who have some common knowledge of Him, or who are able to discourse of Him, and speak of His person and nature rightly, but those who *believe in Him*. Much of our knowledge is like that of the poor philosopher, who defines riches exactly, and discourses of their nature, but possesses none: or we are as a geometrician, who can measure land exactly in all its dimensions, but possesses not a foot thereof. And truly it is but a lifeless unsavory knowledge that men have of Christ by all books and study, until He reveals Himself, and persuades the heart to believe in Him. Then, indeed, when it sees Him, and is made one with Him, it says of all the reports it heard, I heard much, yet *the half was not told me*.[127] There is in lively faith, when it is infused into the soul, a clearer knowledge of Christ and His excellence than before, and with it a recumbence of the soul upon Him, as the foundation of its life and comfort; a resolving to rest on Him, and not to depart from Him upon any terms. Though I be beset on all hands, be accused by the Law, and by my own conscience, and by Satan, and have nothing to answer for myself, yet here I will stay, for I am sure that in Him there is salvation, and nowhere else. All other refuges are but lies, (as it is expressed in the words before these in the Prophet,) poor base shifts that will do no good. God has laid this precious Stone in Sion, for this very purpose, that weary souls may rest upon it; and why should not I make use of it, according to His intention? He has not forbid any, however wretched, to believe, but commands it, and Himself works it where He wills, even in the vilest sinners.

Think it not enough that you know this Stone is laid, but see whether you are built on it by faith. The multitude of imaginary believers lie round about it, but they are never the better nor the surer for that, any more than stones that lie loose in heaps near a foundation, but are not joined to it.—There is no benefit to us by Christ, without union with Him; no comfort in His riches, without an interest in them and a title to them by that union. Then is the soul right when it can say, *He is altogether lovely*,[128] and as the Spouse, He is mine, my well-beloved.[129] This union is the spring of all spiritual consolations. And faith, by which we are thus united, is a Divine work. He who laid this foundation in Sion with His own hand, works likewise, with the same hand, faith in the heart, by which it is knit to this Corner-stone. It is not such an easy thing as we imagine to believe.[130] Many who think they believe, are, on the contrary, like those of whom the Prophet there speaks, as hardened in sin and carnally secure, whom he represents as in covenant with hell and death, walking in sin, and yet promising themselves impunity.

4thly. There is *the firmness* of this building, namely, *He who believes on him shall not be confounded.* This firmness is answerable to the nature of the foundation. Not only the whole frame, but every stone of it abides sure. It is a simple mistake, to judge the persuasion of perseverance to be self-presumption: those who have it are far from building it on themselves, but their foundation is that which makes them sure; because it does not only remain firm itself, but indissolubly supports all who are once built on it. In the Prophet, where this is cited, it is, shall not make haste, but the sense is one: those who are disappointed and ashamed in their hopes, run to and fro, and seek after some new resource; those who come to Christ shall not need to do so. The believing soul makes haste *to* Christ, but it never finds cause to hasten *from* Him: and though the comfort it expects and longs for, might for a time be deferred, yet it gives not over, knowing that in due time it shall rejoice, and shall not have cause to blush, and be ashamed of its confidence in Him. David expresses his distrust, by making haste. I was too hasty when I said so.[131] Hopes frustrated, especially where they have been raised high, and continued long, reproach men with folly, and so shame them. And thus do all earthly hopes serve us when we lean much upon them. We usually find that those things which have promised us the most contentment, pay us with vexation; and they not only prove to be broken reeds, deceiving our trust, but hurtful, running their broken splinters into our hands when we leaned on them. This sure Foundation is laid for us that our souls may be established on it, and be *as Mount Sion, which cannot be removed*.[132] Such times may come as will shake all other supports, but this holds out against all. *Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed*.[133] Though the frame of the world were cracking about a man's ears, he who is built on this foundation may hear it without fear. Why then do we choose to build upon the sand? Believe it, wherever we lay our confidence and affection besides Christ, it shall sooner or later repent us, and shame us; either happily in time, while we may yet change them for Him, and have recourse to Him; or miserably, when it is too late. Remember that we must die, and must *all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ*,[134] and that none of the things we dote on here have power to keep us here, nor have we power to take them along with us, nor, if we could, would they at all profit us there; and therefore when we look back upon them all at parting, we shall wonder what fools we were to make such a poor choice. And in that great day in which *all faces shall gather blackness*,[135] and be filled with confusion, who have neglected to make Christ their stay when He was offered to them, then it shall appear how happy those are who have trusted in Him: they shall not be confounded, but shall lift up their faces, and be acquitted in Him. In their present state they may be founded[136] and exercised, but they shall not be confounded, nor ashamed,—there is a double negation in the original,—by no means; they shall in all *be more than conquerors through him who loved them*.[137]

5thly. The last thing observable is the greatness and excellence of the work, intimated in that first word, *Behold*, which imports this work to be very remarkable, and calls the eyes to fix upon it.

The Lord is marvelous in the least of His works; but in this He has manifested more of His wisdom and power, and let out more of His love to mankind, than in all the rest. Yet we are foolish, and childishly gaze about us upon trifles, and let this great work pass without regard; we scarcely afford it half an eye. Turn your wandering eyes this way; look upon this *precious Stone*, and behold Him, not in mere speculation, but so behold Him, as to lay hold on Him. For we see He is therefore here set forth, that we may believe on Him, and so not be confounded; that we may attain this blessed union, that cannot be dissolved. All other unions are dissoluble. A man may be plucked from his dwelling-house and lands, or they from him, though he have never so good a title to them; may be removed from his dearest friends, the husband from the wife, if not by other accidents in their lifetime, yet surely by death, the greatest dissolver of all those unions, and of that straitest one, of the soul with the body; but it can do nothing against this union, but perfects it. *For I am persuaded,* says St. Paul, *that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.[138]

There is a twofold mistake concerning faith: on the one side, those who are altogether void of it, abusing and flattering themselves, in a vain opinion that they have it; and on the other side, those who have it, misjudging their own condition, and so depriving themselves of much comfort and sweetness that they might find in their believing.

The former is the worse, and yet by far the commoner evil. What one says of wisdom is true of faith; Many would seek after it, and attain it, if they did not falsely imagine that they have attained it already.[139] There is nothing more contrary to the lively nature of faith, than for the soul not to be at all busied with the thoughts of its own spiritual condition, and yet this very character of unbelief passes with a great many for believing. They doubt not, that is, indeed, they consider not what they are; their minds are not all on these things—are not awakened to seek diligently after Jesus, so as not to rest till they find Him. They are well enough without Him; it suffices them to hear there is such a one; but they ask not themselves, Is He mine, or no? Surely, if that be all—not to doubt, the brutes believe as well as they. It is better, without question, to be laboring under doubtings, if it is a more hopeful condition to find a man groaning and complaining, than speechless and breathless and not stirring at all.

There is in spiritual doubtings two things—a solicitous care of the soul concerning its own state, and a diligent inquiry into it, and that is laudable, being a true work of the Spirit of God; but the other thing in them, is perplexity and distrust, arising from darkness and weakness in the soul. Where there is a great deal of smoke, and no clear flame, it argues much moisture in the matter, yet it witnesses certainly that there is fire there; and therefore dubious questioning of a man concerning himself is a much better evidence than that senseless deadness which most take for believing. Men who know nothing in sciences have no doubts. He never truly believed, who was not made first sensible and convinced of unbelief. This is the Spirit's first errand in the world, to convince it of sin; and the sin is this, that they believe not.[140] If the faith that you have grew out of your natural heart of itself, be assured it is but a weed. The right plant of faith is always set by God's own hand, and it is watered and preserved by Him; because exposed to many hazards, He watches it night and day. *I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day*.[141]

Again, how impudent is it in most people, to pretend they believe, while they wallow in profaneness! If faith unites the soul to Christ, certainly it puts it into participation of His Spirit. *Now if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*,[142] says St. Paul. This faith in Christ brings us into communion with God. Now, *God is light*, says St. John; and he therefore infers, *If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth*.[143] The lie appears in our practice, an unsuitableness in our carriage; as one said of him who signed his verse wrong, *Fecit solaecismum manu*—He made a blunder with his hand.

But there are imaginary believers who are a little more refined, who live after a blameless, yea, and a religious manner, as to their outward behavior, and yet are but appearances of Christians, have not the living work of faith within, and all these exercises are dead works in their hands. Amongst these, some may have such notions within them as may deceive themselves, while their external deportment deceives others; they may have some transient touches of desire to Christ, upon the unfolding of His excellences in the preaching of the word, and upon some conviction of their own necessity, and may conceive some joy upon thoughts of apprehending Him; and yet all this proves but a vanishing fancy, an embracing of a shadow. And because men who are thus deluded meet not with Christ indeed, do not really find His sweetness, therefore, within a while, they return to the pleasures of sin, and their latter end proves worse than their beginning.[144] Their hearts could not possibly be steadfast, because there was nothing to fix them on in all that work in which Christ Himself was wanting.

But the truly believing soul who is brought to Jesus Christ, and fastened upon Him by God's own hand, abides stayed on Him, and departs not. And in these persons, the very belief of the things that are spoken concerning Christ in the Gospel, the persuasion of Divine truth, is of a higher nature than the common consent that is called historical; they have another knowledge and evidence of the mysteries of the kingdom than natural men can have. This is indeed the ground of all, the very thing that causes a man to rest upon Christ, when he has a persuasion wrought in his heart by the Spirit of God, that Christ is an able Redeemer, a sufficient Savior, *able to save them to the uttermost who come unto him*.[145] Then, upon this, the heart resolves upon that course—Seeing I am persuaded of this, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life,[146] (or as it is here, *shall not be confounded*,) I am to deliberate no longer; this is the thing I must do, I must lay my soul upon Him, upon one who is an Almighty Redeemer: and it does so. Now, these first actings of faith have in themselves an evidence that distinguishes them from all that is counterfeit, a light of their own, by which the soul, in which they are, may discern them and say, This is the right work of faith; especially when God shines upon the soul, and clears it in the manifestation of His own work within it.

And further, they may find the influence of faith upon the affections, *purifying* them, as our Apostle says of it.[147] Faith knits the heart to a holy Head, a pure Lord, the Spring of purity, and therefore cannot choose but to make it pure: it is a beam from Heaven, that raises the mind to a heavenly temper. Although there are remains of sin in a believing soul, yet it is a hated wearisome guest there. It exists there, not as its delight, but as its greatest grief and malady, which it is still lamenting and complaining of; it had rather be rid of it than gain a world. Thus the soul is purified from the love of sin.

So then where these are—a spiritual apprehension of the promises, a cleaving of the soul to Christ, and such a delight in Him as makes sin vile and distasteful, so that the heart is set against it, and, as the needle touched with the loadstone, is still turned towards Christ, and looks at Him in all estates,—the soul that is thus disposed has certainly an interest in Him; and therefore ought not to affect a humor of doubting, but to conclude, that however unworthy in itself, yet being in Him, it *shall not be ashamed:*[148] not only it shall never have cause to think shame of Him, but all its just cause of shame in itself shall be taken away; it shall be covered with His righteousness, and appear so before the Father. Who must not think, If my sins were to be set in order, and appear against me, how would my face be filled with shame! Though there were no more, if some thoughts that I am guilty of were laid to my charge, I would be utterly ashamed and undone. Oh! there is nothing in myself but matter of shame, but yet in Christ there is more matter of glorying, who endured shame, that we might not be ashamed. We cannot distrust ourselves enough, nor trust enough in Him. Let it be right faith, and there can be no excess in believing. Though I have sinned against Him, and abused His goodness, yet I will not leave Him; for where should I go? He, and no one but He, has the words of eternal life.[149] Yea, though He being so often offended should threaten to leave me to the shame of my own follies, yet I will stay by Hm, and wait for a better answer, and I know I shall obtain it: this is assured me for my comfort, that *whosoever believes in him shall not be ashamed*.

1Pe 2:7-8

Ver. 7. Unto you therefore who believe he is precious: but unto those who are disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

Ver. 8. And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to those who stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Besides all the opposition that faith meets with in our hearts, it has this without, that it rows against the great stream of the world's opinion; and therefore needs, especially where it is very tender and weak, to be strengthened against that. Multitudes of unbelievers, and the considerable quality of many, are continuing causes for that very multitude; and the small numbers of those who truly believe do much to keep them few. And as this prejudice prevails with those who believe not, so it may sometimes assault the mind of a believer, when he thinks how many, and many of them wise men in the world, reject Christ. How can this be? Particularly the believing Jews, to whom this Epistle is addressed, might think it strange that not only the Gentiles who were strangers to true religion, but their own nation—the select people of God, who had the light of His oracles kept in amongst them only, should yet, so many of them, yes, and the chief of them, be despisers and haters of Jesus Christ—and that those who were best versed in the Law, and seemed most able to judge of the foretold Messiah, should have persecuted Christ all His life, and at last put Him to a shameful death.

So that they might know that this makes nothing against Him, nor invalidates their faith at all, but that instead it indeed testifies with Christ, and serves to confirm them in believing, the Apostle makes use of the Prophetic Scriptures that foretell the unbelief and contempt with which most would entertain Christ—as old Simeon speaks of Him, when He came, agreeably to those former predictions, that He should be a *sign which shall be spoken against;*[1] that, as He was the promised sign of salvation to believers, so He would be a very mark of enmities and contradictions to the unbelieving world. The passages the Apostle here uses suit with his present discourse, and with the words cited from Isaiah in the former verse, continuing the resemblance of a corner-stone: they are taken partly from the one hundred and eighteenth Psalm, partly out of the eighth chapter of Isaiah.

Unto you, &c.] Marvel not that others refuse Him, but believe all the more because of that, because you see the word to be true even in their not believing of it—it is fulfilled and verified by their very rejection of it as false.

And whatever the world thinks concerning Christ, matters not, for they know Him not; but you who do indeed believe, I dare appeal to yourselves, to your own faith that you have of Him, whether He is not precious to you, whether you do not really find Him fully answerable to all that is spoken of Him in the word, and to all that you have accordingly believed concerning Him.

We are here to consider, I. The opposition of the persons; and then, II. The things spoken of them.

I. The persons are opposed under the names of *believers*, and *disobedient* or unbelievers; for the word is so near that it may be taken for unbelief, and it is by some so rendered: and the things are fully as near to each other as the words that signify them—disobedience and unbelief.

1. Unbelief is itself the grand disobedience. For *this is the work of God*, that which the Gospel mainly commands, *that you believe;*[2] therefore the Apostle calls it *the obedience of faith*.[3] And there is nothing indeed more worthy of the name of obedience, than the subjection of the mind to receive and to believe the supernatural truths that the Gospel teaches concerning Jesus Christ; to obey, so as to have, as the Apostle speaks, the impression of that Divine pattern stamped upon the heart; to have the heart delivered up, as the word there is, and laid under it to receive it.[4] The word here used for disobedience signifies properly unpersuasion; and nothing can more properly express the nature of unbelief than that; and it is the very nature of our corrupt hearts: we are *children of disobedience*,[5] or unpersuasibleness, altogether incredulous towards God, who is truth itself, and as pliable wax in Satan's hand, who works in such persons what he will, as there the Apostle expresses. They most easily believe him, who is the very father of lies, as our Savior calls Him, a liar and a *murderer from the beginning*,[6] murdering by lies, as he did in the beginning.

2. Unbelief is radically all other disobedience; for all flows from unbelief. This we least of all suspect; but it is the bitter root of all the ungodliness that abounds amongst us. A right and lively persuasion of the heart concerning Jesus Christ alters the whole frame of it, casts down its high, lofty imaginations, and brings not only the outward actions, but *every thought to the obedience of Christ*.[7]

II. As for the things spoken concerning these disobedient unbelievers, these two testimonies taken together have in them these three things: 1. Their rejection of Christ; 2. Their folly; 3. Their misery in so doing.

1. Their rejection of Christ: they did not receive Him, as the Father appointed and designed Him, as the foundation and *chief corner-stone*, but slighted Him, and threw Him by, as unfit for the building; not only the ignorant multitude did this, but the builders, those who professed to have the skill and the office, or power, of building—the Doctors of the Law, the Scribes and Pharisees, and Chief Priests—who thought to carry the matter by the weight of their authority, as overbalancing the belief of those who followed Christ. *Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knows not the law are cursed*.[8]

We need not wonder then, that not only the powers of the world are usually enemies to Christ, and that the contrivers of policies, those builders, leave out Christ in their building, but that the pretended builders of the Church of God, though they use the name of Christ, and serve their turn with that, yet reject Himself, and oppose the power of His spiritual kingdom. There may be wit and learning, and much knowledge of the Scriptures, amongst those who are haters of the Lord Christ and of the power of godliness, and corrupters of the worship of God. It is the spirit of humility, and obedience, and saving faith, which teaches men to esteem Christ, and build upon Him.

2. But the vanity and folly of those builders' opinion appears in this, that they are overpowered by the great Architect of the Church: His purpose stands. Notwithstanding their rejection of Christ, He is still made the head corner-stone. They cast Him away by their miscensures and reproaches put upon Him, and by giving Him up to be crucified and then cast into the grave, causing a stone to be rolled upon this *Stone* which they had so rejected, that it might appear no more: and so thought themselves sure. But He arose even from there, and *became the head of the corner*. The disciples themselves spoke, you know, very doubtfully of their former hopes: *We trusted that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel;*[9] but He corrected their mistake, first by His word, showing them the true method of that great work, *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?*[10] and then really, by making Himself known to them, as risen from the dead. When He was by these rejected and lay lowest, then was He nearest His exaltation; as Joseph in the prison was nearest his promotion. And thus it is with the Church of Christ: when it is brought to the lowest and most desperate condition, then its deliverance is at hand: it prospers and gains in the event, by all the practices of men against it. And as this Corner-stone was fitted to be such by the very rejection of it, so it is with the whole building—it rises the higher the more men seek to demolish it.

3. The unhappiness of those who believe not is expressed in the other word—He is to them *a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*. Because they will not be saved by Him, they shall stumble and fall, and be broken to pieces on Him, as it is in Isaiah, and in the Evangelists. But how is this? Has He who came to save become a destroyer of men? He whose name is Salvation, proves He destruction to any? Not He Himself: His primary and proper use is the former, to be a foundation for souls to build and rest upon; but those who, instead of building upon Him, will stumble and fall on Him, what wonder, being so firm a stone, though they be broken by their fall! Thus we see the mischief of unbelief, that as other sins disable the Law, this disables the very Gospel to save us, and turns life itself into death to us. And this is the misery, not of a few, but of many in Israel. Many who hear of Christ by the preaching of the Gospel, shall lament that they ever heard that sound, and shall wish to have lived and died without it, finding so great an increase to their misery, by the *neglect of so great salvation*.[11] They are said to *stumble at the word*, because they labor not to understand and rightly prize the things in it that testify of Christ; but either altogether slight them, and consider them foolishness, or misunderstand and pervert them.

The Jews stumbled at the meanness of Christ's birth and life, and the ignominy of His death, not judging of Him according to the Scriptures; and we, in another way, think we have some kind of belief that He is the Savior of the world, yet not making the Scripture the rule of our thoughts concerning Him, many of us undo ourselves, and stumble and break our necks upon this rock, mistaking Christ and the way of believing; looking on Him as a Savior at large, and judging that enough; not endeavoring to make Him ours, and to embrace Him upon the terms of that new covenant of which He is the Mediator.

Whereunto also they were appointed.] This the Apostle adds, for the further satisfaction of believers in this point, how it is that so many reject Christ, and stumble at Him; telling them plainly, that the secret purpose of God is accomplished in this—God having determined to glorify His justice on impenitent sinners, as He shows His rich mercy in those who believe. Here it would be easier to lead you into a deep, than to lead you forth again. I will rather stand on the shore, and silently admire it, than enter into it. This is certain, that the thoughts of God are all no less just in themselves, than deep and unfathomable by us. His justice appears clear, in that man's destruction is always the fruit of his own sin. But to give causes of God's decrees without Himself, is neither agreeable with the primitive being of the nature of God, nor with the doctrine of the Scriptures. This is sure, that God is not bound to give us further account of these things, and we are bound not to ask it. Let those two words, as St. Augustine says, answer all, *O man, who are you?* and, *O the depth!*[12]

Our only sure way to know that our names are not in that black line, and to be persuaded that He has chosen us to be saved by His Son, is this—to find that we have chosen Him, and are built on Him by faith, which is the fruit of His love, who first chooses us; and that we may read in our esteem of Him.

He is precious,] Or, your honor. The difference is small. You account Him your glory and your gain; He is not only precious to you, but preciousness itself. He is the thing that you make account of, your jewel, which if you keep, though you might be robbed of all else, you know yourselves to be rich enough.

To you that believe.] Faith is absolutely necessary to make this due estimate of Christ.

1. The most excellent things, while their worth is unseen and unknown, affect us not. Now Faith is the proper seeing faculty of the soul, in relation to Christ—that inward light must be infused from above, to make Christ visible to us; without it, though He is beautiful, yet we are blind; and therefore cannot love Him for that beauty. But by Faith, we are enabled to see Him who is *fairer than the children of men*,[13] not only so, but to see in Him, *the glory as of the only begotten of the Father;*[14] and then, it is not possible but to account Him precious, and to bestow the entire affection of our hearts upon Him. And if any say to the soul, *What is your beloved more than another beloved?*[15] it willingly lays hold on the question, and is glad for an opportunity to extol Him.

2. Faith, as it is that which discerns Christ, so it alone appropriates Him, makes Him our own. And these are the two reasons for our esteeming and affecting anything—its own worth, and our interest in it. Faith begets this esteem of Christ by both—first, it reveals to us His excellences, which we could not see before; and then, it makes Him ours, gives us possession of whole Christ, all that He has, and is. As it is Faith that commends Christ so much, and describes His comeliness in that Song, so that word is the voice of Faith, which expresses propriety. *My beloved is mine, and I am his*.[16] And these together make Him most precious to the soul. Having once possession of Him, it then looks upon all His sufferings as endured particularly for it, and the benefit of them all as belonging to itself. Surely it will say, How can I not consider Him precious, who suffered shame that I might not be ashamed, and suffered death that I might not die; who took that bitter cup of the Father's wrath, and drank it up, that I might be free from it?

Don't think that you believe, if your hearts are not taken up with Christ, if His love does not possess your soul, so that nothing is precious to you compared to Him; if you cannot despise and trample upon all advantages that either you have or would have for Christ, and count them, with the great Apostle, loss and dung in comparison with Him.[17] And if you do esteem Him, labor for increase of faith, that you might esteem Him more; for as faith grows, so will He still be more precious to you. And if you would have it grow, turn that spiritual eye frequently to Him, who is the proper object of it. For even those who are believers may possibly abate of their love and esteem of Christ, by allowing faith to lie dead within them and not using it in beholding and applying of Christ; and the world, or some particular vanities, may insensibly creep in, and get into the heart, and cost them much pains before they can be thrust out again. But when they are daily reviewing those excellencies that are in Christ, which first persuaded their hearts to love Him, and are discovering still more and more of them, His love will certainly grow, and will chase away those follies that the world dotes upon, as unworthy to be taken notice of.

1Pe 2:9

Ver. 9. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should shew forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

It is a matter of very much consolation and instruction to Christians to know their own state—what they are, as they are Christians. This Epistle is much and often upon this point for both those ends; that the reflection upon their dignities in Christ may uphold them with comfort under suffering for Him; and that it might lead them in doing and walking as becomes such a condition. Here it has been represented to us by a building, a spiritual temple, and by a priesthood conformable to it.

The former is confirmed and illustrated by testimonies of Scripture in the preceding verses; the latter in this verse, in which, though it is not expressly cited, yet it is clear that the Apostle has reference to Exo 19:5-6, where this dignity of priesthood, together with the other titles here expressed, is ascribed to all the chosen people of God. It is there a promise made to the nation of the Jews, but under the condition of obedience, and therefore it is most fitly here applied by the Apostle, to the believing Jews, to whom particularly he writes.

It is true that the external priesthood of the law is abolished by the coming of this great High Priest, Jesus Christ being the body of all those shadows; but this promised dignity of a spiritual priesthood is so far from being annulled by Christ, that it is altogether dependent upon Him, and therefore fails in those who reject Christ, although they are of that nation to which this promise was made. But it holds good in all, of all nations, who believe, and particularly, says the Apostle, it is verified in you. You who are believing Jews, by receiving Christ, receive with it this dignity.

As the legal priesthood was removed by Christ's fulfilling all that it prefigured, so He was rejected by those who were in possession of that office at His coming; since the duration of their priesthood was inconsistent with the revelation of Jesus Christ, those who were then in it being ungodly men, their carnal minds had a kind of antipathy against Him. Though they pretended themselves builders of the Church, and by their calling ought to have been so, yet they threw away the Foundation-stone that God had chosen and designed, and in their rejection of it, manifested that they themselves were rejected by God. But, on the contrary, you who have laid your souls on Christ by believing, have this, your choosing Him, as a certain evidence that God has chosen you to be His peculiar people, not only so, but to be so dignified as to be a royal priesthood, through Christ.

We have here to consider, I. The state of Christians, in the words that here describe it; II. The opposition of it to the state of unbelievers; III. The end of it.

First. The state of Christians: *A chosen generation*. So, in Psa 24:1-10. The Psalmist there speaks first of God's universal sovereignty, then of His peculiar choice. *The earth is the Lord's* (ver. 1), but there is a select company appointed for His holy mountain, there described; and the description is closed thus, *This is the generation of those who seek him* (ver. 6). Thus, Deu 10:14-15, and Exo 19:5, from which this passage is taken, *For all the earth is mine*, and that nation which is a figure of the elect of all nations, God's peculiar people, beyond all others in the world. As men who have great variety of possessions, yet have usually their special delight in some one beyond all the rest, and choose to reside most in it, and bestow most expense on it to make it pleasant; so does the Lord of the whole earth choose out for Himself, from the rest of the world, a number that are *a chosen generation*.

Choosing, here, is the work of effectual calling, or the severing of believers from the rest; for it signifies a difference in their present state, as do likewise the other words joined with it. But this election is altogether conformable to that of God's eternal decree, and is nothing more than the execution or performance of it; God's framing of this His building being just according to the idea of it which was in His mind and purpose before all time—it is the drawing forth and investing of those into this Christian, this kingly priesthood, whose names were expressly written up for it in the book of life.

Generation.] This signifies them to be of one race or stock. As the Israelites, who were by outward calling the children of God, were all the seed of Abraham according to the flesh; so, those who believe in the Lord Jesus are *the children of promise;*[18] and all of them are, by their new birth, one people or generation. They are of one nation, belonging to the same blessed land of promise, all citizens of the New Jerusalem, not only so, but all children of the same family, of which Jesus Christ, the *root of Jesse*,[19] is the stock, who is the great *King*, and the *great High Priest*. And thus they are a *royal priesthood*. There is no devolving of His royalty or priesthood on any other, as it is in Himself; for His proper dignity is supreme and incommunicable, and there is no succession in His order: He lives for ever, and is a *priest forever*,[20] and king forever too.[21] But those who are descended from Him derive from Him, by that new original, this double dignity, in that way that they are capable of it, to be likewise kings and priests, as He is both. They are of the seed royal, and of the holy seed of the priesthood, inasmuch as they partake of a new life from Christ. Thus, in Rev 1:5-6, first there is His own dignity expressed, then His dignifying us: *who is* Himself *the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth;* and then it follows, *and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father*.

A royal priesthood.] That the dignity of believers is expressed by these two together, by *priesthood* and *royalty*, teaches us the worth and excellence of that holy function taken properly, and so, by analogy, the dignity of the ministry of the Gospel, which God has placed in His Church, instead of the priesthood of the Law; for this title of spiritual priesthood fitly signifies a great privilege and honor that Christians are promoted to, and it is joined with that of kings, because the proper office of priesthood was so honorable. Before it was established in one family, the chief, the firstborn of each family, had a right to this, as a special honor; and amongst the heathens, in some places, their princes and greatest men, yea, their kings, were their priests, and, universally, the performance of their holy things was an employment of great honor and esteem amongst them. Though human ambition has strained this consideration too high, to the favoring and founding of a monarchical prelacy in the Christian world, yet the abuse of it should not prejudice us of this due and just consequence from it, that the holy functions of God's house have very much honor and dignity in them. And the Apostle, we see,[22] prefers the ministry of the Gospel to the priesthood of the law. So then, those who think it is a disparagement to men who have some advantages of birth or wit more than ordinary, to bestow them thus, and who judge the meanest persons and things good enough for this high calling, are mistaken. Surely this conceit cannot have place but in an unholy irreligious mind, that has either no thoughts or very mean thoughts of God. If those who are called to this holy service would themselves consider this rightly, it would not puff them up, but humble them: comparing their own worthlessness with this great work, they would wonder at God's dispensation, that should thus have honored them. As St. Paul speaks of himself, *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given*,[23] &c., so, the more a man rightly extols this his calling, the more he humbles himself under the weight of it; and this would make him very careful to walk more suitably to it in eminency of holiness, for in that consists its true dignity.

There is no doubt that this kingly priesthood is the common dignity of all believers—*this honor have all his saints*.[24] They are kings, have victory, and dominion given them over the powers of darkness and the lusts of their own hearts, which held them captive, and domineered over them before. Base, slavish lusts, not born to command, yet are the hard taskmasters of unrenewed minds; and there is no true subduing of them, but by the power and Spirit of Christ. They may be quiet for a while in a natural man, but they are then but asleep; as soon as they wake again, they return to hurry and drive him with their usual violence. Now this is the benefit of receiving the kingdom of Christ into a man's heart, that it makes him a king himself. All the subjects of Christ are kings, not only regarding that pure crown of glory they hope for, and shall certainly attain, but in the present, they have a kingdom which is the pledge of that other, overcoming the world, and Satan, and themselves, by the power of faith. *Mens bona regnum possidet*—A good mind possesses a kingdom, it is true; but there is no mind truly good, but that in which Christ dwells. There is not any kind of spirit in the world as noble as that Spirit who is in a Christian, the very Spirit of Jesus Christ, the great King, the Spirit of glory, as our Apostle calls it below, ch. 4. This is a sure way to ennoble the basest and poorest amongst us. This royalty takes away all accusations, and leaves nothing of all that is passed to be laid to our charge, or to dishonor us.

Believers are not shut out from God, as they were before, but, being in Christ, are brought near to Him, and have free access to the throne of His grace.[25] They resemble, in their spiritual state, the legal priesthood very clearly, I. In their consecration; II. In their service; and, III. In their laws of living.

I. In their consecration. The Levitical priests were, 1. Washed; therefore this is expressed, *He has washed us in his own blood*, and then follows, *and has made us kings and priests*.[26] There would have been no coming near to God in His holy services as His priests, unless we had been cleansed from the guiltiness and pollution of our sins. That pure and purging blood does this—and it alone. No other laver can do it; no water but that *fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness*.[27] No blood, none of all that blood of legal sacrifices,[28] but only the blood of that spotless Lamb *which takes away the sin of the world*.[29] So with this, 2. We have that other ceremony of the priest's consecration, which was by sacrifice, as well as by washing; for Christ at once offered up Himself as our sacrifice, and let out His blood for our washing. With good reason is that prefixed there, *Him who loved us*, and then it follows, *washed us in his own blood*.[30] That precious stream of His heart-blood, which flowed for our washing, told clearly that the source of it was a heart of unspeakable love. 3. There is anointing, namely, the graces of the Spirit conferred upon believers, flowing unto them from Christ. *For of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace;*[31] and the Apostle St. Paul says that we are established and anointed in Christ.[32] It was poured on Him as our Head, and runs down from Him to us; He the *Christ*, and we *Christians*, as partakers of His anointing. The consecrating oil of the priests was made of the richest ointments and spices, to show the preciousness of the graces of God's Spirit, which are bestowed on these spiritual priests; and as that holy oil was not for common use, nor for any other persons to be anointed with it, save the priests only, so is the Spirit of grace a peculiar gift to believers. Others might have costly ointments amongst the Jews, but none of that same sort with the consecration oil. Natural men may have very great gifts of judgment, and learning, and eloquence, and moral virtues, but they have none of this precious oil, namely, the Spirit of Christ, communicated to them; no, all their endowments are but common and profane. That holy oil signified particularly eminency of light and knowledge in the priests; therefore, in Christians there must be light. Those who are grossly ignorant of spiritual things are surely not of this order; this anointing is said to teach us all things.[33] That holy oil was of a most fragrant sweet smell, because of its precious composition; but sweeter still is the smell of that Spirit by which believers are anointed, those several odoriferous graces, which are the ingredients of their anointing oil, that heavenly-mindedness, and meekness, and patience, and humility, and the rest, which diffuse a pleasant scent into the places and societies where they come; their words, their actions, and their conduct smelling sweet of them. 4. The garments in which the priests were inaugurated, and which they were wear afterwards in their services, are outshone by that purity and holiness with which all the Saints are adorned; but still more by that imputed righteousness of Christ, those pure robes that are put upon them, in which they appear before the Lord, and are acceptable in His sight. These priests are indeed *clothed with righteousness*, according to that of the Psalmist.[34] The priests were to have the offerings put into their hands; from there, filling of the hand signifies consecrating to the priesthood. And Jesus Christ, the consecrator of these priests, does this; He puts into their hands by His Spirit the offerings they are to present to God. He furnishes them with prayers, and praises, and all other oblations, that are to be offered by them; He gives them themselves, which they are to offer a living sacrifice, rescuing them from the usurped possession of Satan and sin.

II. Let us consider their services, which were many. To name the chief, 1. They had charge of the sanctuary and the vessels of it, and the lights, and were to keep the lamps burning. Thus the heart of every Christian is made a temple to the Holy Ghost, and he himself, as a priest consecrated to God, is to keep it diligently, and the store of Divine grace in it; to have the light of spiritual knowledge within him, and to nourish it by drawing continually new supplies from Jesus Christ. 2. The priests were to bless the people. And truly it is this spiritual priesthood, the Elect, who procure blessings upon the rest of the world, and particularly on the places where they live. They are to offer daily the incense of prayer, and other spiritual sacrifices to God, as the Apostle expresses it above, (verse 5,) not to neglect those holy exercises together or apart. And as the priests offered not only for themselves, but also for the people, so Christians are to extend their prayers, and to entreat the blessings of God for others, especially for the public state of the Church. As the Lord's priests, they are to offer up those praises to God, that are His due from the other creatures, who praise Him indeed, yet cannot do it after the manner in which these priests do; therefore they are to offer, as it were, their sacrifices for them, as the priests did for the people. And because most men neglect to do this, and cannot do it indeed, because they are unholy, and are not of this priesthood, therefore should they be so much the more careful of it and diligent in it. How few of those, whom the heavens call to by their light and revolution which they enjoy, offer that sacrifice which becomes them, by acknowledging the glory of God which the heavens declare![35] This, therefore, is as it were put into the hands of these priests, namely the godly, to do.

III. Let us consider their course of life. We shall find rules given to the legal priests, stricter than to others, of avoiding legal pollutions, &c. And from these, this spiritual priesthood must learn an exact, holy conduct, keeping themselves from the pollutions of the world; as here it follows: *a holy nation*, and that of necessity; if a priesthood, then holy. They are purchased indeed to be *a peculiar treasure* to God,[36] at a very high rate. He spared not His only Son, nor did the Son spare Himself; so that these priests ought to be the Lord's peculiar portion. All believers are His clergy; and as they are His portion, so He is theirs. The priests had no assigned inheritance among their brethren, and the reason is added, for the Lord is their portion; and truly so they needed not envy any of the rest, they had the choicest of all, the Lord of all. Whatever a Christian possesses in the world, yet, being of this spiritual priesthood, he is *as though* he *possessed not*,[37] lays little account on it. That which his mind is set upon, is how he may enjoy God, and find clear assurance that he has Him for his portion.

It is not so mean a thing to be a Christian as we think; it is a holy, an honorable, a happy state. Few of us can esteem it, or labor to find it so. No, we don't know these things, our hearts are not set on them, to make this dignity and happiness sure to our souls. Where is that true greatness of mind and holiness to be found, which becomes those who are Kings and Priests to God?—that contempt of earthly things and minding of Heaven, that should be in such? But surely, those who find themselves indeed partakers of these dignities, will study to live agreeably to them, and will not fail to love the Lord Jesus who has purchased all this for them, and exalted them to it; not only so, but, humbled Himself to exalt them.

Now, secondly, as to the opposition of the state of Christians to that of unbelievers. We best discern, and are most sensible of the evil or good of things by comparison. In regard to the outward condition, how many are there who are vexing themselves with causeless murmurings and discontentment, who, if they would look upon the many in the world that are in a far lower condition than themselves, would be cured of that evil! It would make them not only content, but also cheerful and thankful. But the difference here expressed, is far greater and more considerable than any that can be in outward things. Though the state of a Christian is very excellent and precious, and, when rightly valued, has enough in itself to commend it, yet it does and ought to raise our esteem of it all the higher, when we compare it both with the misery of our former condition, and with the continuing misery of those who abide still, and are left to perish in that woeful state. We have here both of these parallels. The happiness and dignity to which they are chosen and called, is opposed to the rejection and misery of those who continue unbelievers and rejecters of Christ.

Not only natural men, but even those who have a spiritual life in them, when they forget themselves, are subject to look upon the things that are before them with a natural eye, and to think hardly, or at least doubtfully, concerning God's dispensations, beholding the flourishing and prosperities of the ungodly, together with their own sufferings and distresses. Thus Psa 73:1-28. But when they turn the other side of the medal, and view them with a right eye, and by a true light, they are no longer abused with those appearances. When they consider unbelievers as strangers, yes, enemies to God, and slaves to Satan, held fast in the chains of their own impenitence and unbelief, and by these bound over to eternal death, and then see themselves called to the liberties and dignities of the sons of God, partakers of the honor of the only-begotten Son, on whom they have believed, made by Him kings and priests to God the Father, then, surely, they have other thoughts. They no longer envy, but pity the ungodly, and consider all their pomp and all their possessions what they are indeed, nothing more than a glistening misery, and consider themselves happy in all circumstances. It makes them say with David, *The lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage*.[38] It makes them digest all their sufferings and disgraces with patience, yea, with joy, and think more of praising than complaining, more of showing forth His honor who has so honored them; especially when they consider the freeness of His grace, that it was that alone which made the difference, calling them altogether undeservedly from that same darkness and misery in which unbelievers are deservedly left.

Now the Third thing here to be spoken to is, the *End* of their calling, *to show forth His praise,* &c. And so that we might all the more prize the reasonableness of that happy state to which God has exalted them, it is expressed in other terms; which therefore we will first consider, and then the end.

To magnify the grace of God the more, we have here, I. Both the terms of this motion or change,—from where and to what it is; II. The principle of it, the calling of God.

I. For the terms of this motion: *out of darkness.* There is nothing more usual, not only in Divine, but in human writings, than to borrow outward sensible things, to express things intellectual; and amongst such expressions there is none more frequent than that of light and darkness, transferred to signify the good and the evil estate of man, as sometimes for his outward prosperity or adversity, but especially for things proper to his mind. The mind is called light, because it is the seat of truth, and truth is most fitly called light, being the chief beauty and ornament of the rational world, as light is of the visible. And as the light, because of its beauty, is a thing very refreshing and comfortable to those who behold it, (as Solomon says, *A pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun*,[39]) so is truth a most delightful thing to the soul that rightly apprehends it. This may help us to think of the spiritual sense in which it is here taken. The state of lost mankind is indeed nothing but darkness, being destitute of all spiritual truth and comfort, and tending to utter and everlasting darkness. And it is so, because by sin the soul is separated from God, who is the first and highest light, the primitive truth. As He is light in Himself, (as the Apostle St. John tells us God is light, and in him is *no darkness at all*,[40] expressing the excellence and purity of His nature,) so He is light relatively to the soul of man: *The Lord is my light*, says David.[41]

And the soul being made capable of Divine light, cannot be happy without it. Give it what other light you will, still it is in darkness so long as it is without God, He being the peculiar light and life of the soul. And as truth is united with the soul in apprehending it, and light with the visive faculty, so, in order that the soul may have God as its light, it must of necessity be in union with God. Now sin has broken that union, and so cut off the soul from its light, and plunged it into spiritual darkness.

Hence all that confusion and disorder in the soul, which is ever the companion of darkness: *Toku xabohu*—without form and void, as it was at first, when *darkness was upon the face of the deep*.[42] Being ignorant of God and of ourselves, it follows that we love not God, because we know Him not; yea, (though we think it is a hard word,) we are *haters of God;*[43] for not only does our darkness import ignorance of Him, but an enmity to Him, because He is light, and we are darkness. And being ignorant of ourselves, not seeing our own vileness, because we are in the dark, we are pleased with ourselves, and having left God, we love ourselves instead of God. Hence are all the wickedness of our hearts and lives, which are nothing more than, instead of obeying and pleasing God, a continual sacrificing to those *Gillulim*,[44] those base dunghill-gods, our own lusts. For this, the Apostle Paul gives as the root of all evil dispositions 3; because, in the first place, *lovers of their own selves, therefore, covetous, boasters, proud, &c., and lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*. And this self-love cannot exist without gross ignorance; our minds are so darkened that we cannot see what we are; for if we did, we would without a doubt, have a different opinion altogether, very far from loving and being pleased with ourselves. Thus our souls being filled with darkness, are likewise full of uncleanness, as that goes along too with darkness; they are not only dark as dungeons, but also filthy as dungeons used to be. So, Ephes. 4:18, *Having the understanding darkened, alienated from the life of God;* and therefore it is added, ver. 19, *have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness*. Again, in this state they have no light of solid comfort. Our great comfort here, is not in anything present, but in hope; now, being without Christ, and without God, we are without hope.[45]

And as the state from which we are called by grace is worthily called *darkness*, so that, to which it calls us, deserves as well the name of *light*. Christ, likewise, who came to work our deliverance, is frequently so called in Scripture; as Joh 1:9, *That was the true Light;* not only in regard of His own nature, being God equal with the Father, and therefore light, as He is God of God, and therefore, Light of Light; but relatively to men, as Joh 1:4, *the life was the light of men.* So He is called the Word, and the Wisdom of the Father, not only regarding His own knowledge, but as revealing Him to us. See Joh 1:18, and 1 Cor. 18, compared with verse 30. And He is named by Mal 4:2, *The Sun of Righteousness*. Now, the sun is not only a luminous body, but also a luminary giving light to the world.[46]

He is our light, opposed to all kinds of darkness. He is so, in opposition to the dark shadows of the ceremonial law, which possibly are here meant, as part of that darkness from which the Apostle writes that these Jews were delivered also by the knowledge of Christ: when He came, the day broke and the shadows flew away.[47] He is our light as opposed likewise to the darkness of the Gentile superstitions and idolatries; therefore these two are joined by old Simeon, *A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel*.[48] And to all who believe among both, He is light as opposed to the ignorance, slavery and misery, of their natural state, teaching them by His Spirit the things of God, and reuniting them with God, who is the light of the soul. *I am*, says He, *the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness*.[49]

And it is that mysterious union of the soul with God in Christ, which a natural man so little understands, that is the cause of all that spiritual light of grace that a believer enjoys. There is no right knowledge of God, to man once fallen from it, but in His Son; no comfort in beholding God, but through Him; nothing but just anger and wrath to be seen in God's looks, but through Him, in whom He is well pleased.[50] The Gospel shows us *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, but it is in the face of Jesus Christ*.[51] Therefore the kingdom of light, as opposed to that of darkness, is called *the kingdom of His dear Son*, or, the Son of His love.[52]

There is a spirit of light and knowledge flowing from Jesus Christ into the souls of believers, that acquaints them with *the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven*,[53] which cannot otherwise be known. And this spirit of knowledge is also a spirit of holiness; for purity and holiness are likewise signified by this light. He removed that huge dark body of sin that was between us and the Father, and eclipsed Him from us. The light of His countenance sanctifies by truth; it is a light that has heat with it, and has influence upon the affections, warming them towards God and Divine things. This darkness here is indeed the shadow of death, and those who are without Christ, are said, until He visits them, *to sit in darkness and in the shadow of death;*[54] so, this Light is life,[55] it enlightens and enlivens, begetting new actions and motions in the soul. The right notion that a man has of things as they are, works upon him, and stirs him accordingly; thus this light reveals a man to himself, and lets him see his own natural filthiness, makes him loathe himself, and flee from himself,—run out of himself. And the excellence he sees in God and His Son Jesus Christ, by this new light, inflames his heart with their love, fills him with the estimation of the Lord Jesus, and makes the world and all things in it that he esteemed before, base and mean in his eyes. Then spiritual joy and comfort arise from this delight, which are frequently signified by this expression, as in that verse of the Psalmist, (the latter clause expounds the former,) *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart*.[56] As this *kingdom of God's dear Son*,[57] that is, this kingdom of light, has righteousness in it, so it has *peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*.[58] It is a false prejudice the world has taken up against religion, that it is a sour melancholy thing: there is no truly cheerful and comfortable life but it. All others, regardless of what they have, live in darkness: and is not that truly sad and comfortless? Would you think it a pleasant life if you were kept in a dungeon, with fine clothes and a good diet—but never saw the sun? Thus are those who live in worldly honor and plenty, but still without God; they are in continual darkness, with all their enjoyments.

It is true that the light of believers is not here perfect, and therefore neither is their joy perfect: it is sometimes overclouded; but the comfort is this, that it is an everlasting light, it shall never go out in darkness, as it is said in Job 18:5, *the light of the wicked shall be put out:* and it shall within awhile be perfected: there is a bright morning without a cloud that shall arise. The saints have not only light to lead them in their journey, but much purer light at home, an *inheritance in light*.[59] The land where their inheritance lies is full of light, and their inheritance itself is light; for the vision of God forever is that inheritance. That city has no need of the sun, nor of the moon, to shine in it, *for the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*.[60] As we said, that Uncreated Light is the happiness of the soul, the beginnings of it are our happiness begun; they are beams of it, sent from above, to lead us to the fountain and fullness of it. *With You*, says David, *is the fountain of life: in Your light shall we see light*.[61]

There are two things spoken about this Light, to commend it—His *marvelous light;* that it is after a peculiar manner *God's*, and then, that it is *marvelous*.

All light is from Him, the light of sense, and that of reason; therefore He is called the *Father of lights*.[62] But this light of grace is peculiarly His, being a light above the reach of nature, infused into the soul in a supernatural way; the light of the elect world, where God specially and graciously resides. Natural men may know very much in natural things, and, it may be, in supernatural things, after a natural manner. They may be full of school-divinity, and be able to discourse of God and His Son Christ, and the mystery of redemption, &c., and yet they lack this peculiar light, by which Christ is known to believers. They may speak of Him, but it is in the dark; they see Him not, and therefore they love Him not. The light they have, is as the light of some things that shine only in the night, a cold glow-worm light that has no heat with it at all. But a soul that has some of *His* light, God's peculiar light, communicated to it, sees Jesus Christ, and loves and delights in Him and walks with Him. A little of this light is worth a great deal, yea, more worth than all of the other common, speculative, and discoursing knowledge that the greatest doctors can attain to. It is of a more excellent kind and original—it is from Heaven, and you know that one beam of the sun is of more worth than the light of ten thousand torches together. It is a pure, undecaying, heavenly light, whereas the other is gross and earthly, (be it never so great,) and lasts but a while. Let us not therefore think it incredible that a poor unlettered Christian may know more of God, in the best kind of knowledge, than any of the wisest and most learned natural man can do; for the one knows God only by man's light, the other knows Him by His own light, and that is the only right knowledge. As the sun cannot be seen but by its own light, so neither can God be savingly known, but by His own revelation.

Now this light being so peculiarly *God's*, no wonder if it be *marvelous*. The common light of the world is so, although because of its commonness, we don't think so. The Lord is marvelous in wisdom and in power, in all His works of creation and providence; but above all, in the workings of His grace. This light is unknown to the world, and so marvelous in the rareness of beholding it, that there are but a few who partake of it. And to those who see, it is marvelous; because in it they see so many excellent things that they knew not before: as if a man were born and brought up, until he came to years of understanding, in a dungeon, where he had never seen light, and were brought forth all of a sudden; or, not to need that imagination, take the man that was born blind, at his first sight, after Christ had cured him,—what wonder, think we, would seize upon him, to suddenly behold the beauty of this visible world, especially of the sun, and that light that makes it both visible and beautiful! But how much more is there to admire in this light, to the soul just brought from the darkness of corrupt nature! They see as it were a new world, and in it such wonders of the rich grace and love of God, such matchless worth in Jesus Christ the Sun of Righteousness, that their souls are filled with admiration. And if this light of grace be so marvelous, how much more marvelous shall the light of glory be in which it ends!

Hence, 1. Learn to highly esteem the Gospel, in which this light shines unto us: the Apostle calls it, therefore, *The glorious Gospel*.[63] Surely we have no reason to be ashamed of it, but every reason to be ashamed of ourselves, that we are so unlike it.

2. Think not, you who are grossly ignorant of God, and His Son Christ, and the mysteries of salvation, that you have any portion as yet in His grace; for the first character of His renewed image in the soul is light, as it was His first work in the world. What benefit is it to us to live in the noonday light of the Gospel, if our hearts are still shut against it, and so within we are nothing but darkness?—as a house that is close shut up, and has no entry for light, though it is day without, still it is night within.

3. Consider your delight in the works of darkness, and be afraid of that great condemnation. This is the condemnation of the world, *that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light*.[64]

4. You who are indeed partakers of this happy change, let your hearts be habitations of light. *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*.[65] Study much to increase in spiritual light and knowledge, and in all holiness and obedience; if your light is the light of God, truly spiritual light, these will accompany it. Consider the rich love of God, and consider His light marvelous, as in itself, so in this, that He has bestowed it on you. *And seeing you were sometimes darkness, but now are you light in the Lord,* I beseech you—nay, the Apostle, and in him the Spirit of God, beseeches you, *Walk as children of light*.[66]

II. But to proceed to speak to the other parts of this verse, as to the principle of this change, *the calling of God*.

It is known and confessed to be a chief point of wisdom in a man, to consider what he is, from whom he has his being, and to what end. When a Christian has thought on this in his natural being, as he is a man, he has the same to consider over again of his spiritual being, as he is a Christian and so a new creature. And in this notion, all the three are very clearly represented to him in these words, 1. What he is, first, by these titles of dignity in the first words of this verse: and again, by an estate of light in the last clause of it. 2. Whence a Christian has this excellent being is very express here, *He has called you*. That God who is the author of all kinds of being, has given you this, *called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*. If you are *a chosen generation*, it is He who has chosen you.[67] If you are *a royal priesthood*, you know that it is He who has anointed you. If *a holy nation*, He has sanctified you.[68] If *a peculiar or purchased people*, it is He who has bought you.[69] All are included in this calling, and they are all one thing. 3. To what end,—to *show forth His praises*. Of the first of these, in all the different expressions of it, we have spoken before; now we shall consider the other two.

He has called you.] Those who live in the society, and profess the faith of Christians, are called unto *light*, the light of the Gospel that shines in the Church of God. Now, this is no small favor and privilege, while many people are left in *darkness and in the shadow of death*, to have this light rise upon us, and to be in the region of it, the Church, the *Goshen* of the world; for by this outward light we are invited to this happy state of saving inward light, and the former is here to be understood as the means of the latter. These Jews who were called to the profession of the Christian faith, to whom our Apostle writes, were even in that respect called unto a light hidden from the rest of their nation, and from many other nations in the world: but because the Apostle undoubtedly describes here the lively spiritual state of true believers, therefore this calling further signifies the effectual work of conversion, making the daylight of salvation, not only without, but within them, the *day-star* to *arise in their hearts*.[70] When the sun has arisen, yet if a man be lying fast in a dark prison, and in a deep sleep too, it is not day to him; he is not called to light, till someone open the doors and awakens him, and brings him forth to it. This God does, in the calling here meant. That which is here termed calling, in regard of the way of God's working with the soul, is, in regard of the power of it, called a rescuing and bringing forth of the soul: so the Apostle St. Paul speaks of it,[71] *Delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son*. That delivering and translating is this calling, and it is *from the power of darkness*—a forcible power—that detains the soul captive. As there are chains of eternal darkness upon damned spirits, which shall never be taken off, wherein they are said to be *reserved unto the judgment of the great day*,[72] so there are chains of spiritual darkness upon the unconverted soul, that can be taken off by no other hand but the powerful hand of God. He calls the sinner to come forth, and also causes, by the power of that His voice, the bolts and fetters to fall off, and enables the soul to come forth into the light. It is an operative word that effects what it bids, as that in the creation, *God said, Let there be light; and there was light;*[73] to which the Apostle has reference[74] when he says, *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts*. God calls man. He works with him indeed as with a reasonable creature, but surely, He likewise works as Himself, as an Almighty Creator. He works strongly and sweetly, with an Almighty easiness. One man may call another to this light, and if there is nothing more, he may call long enough to no purpose; as they tell of Mahomet's miracle that misgave,—he called a mountain to come to him, but it stirred not. But His call, which shakes and removes the mountains, does, in a way known to Himself, turn and wind the heart in the way that He pleases. *The voice of the Lord is powerful and is full of majesty*.[75] If He speaks once to the heart, it cannot choose but to follow Him, and yet most willingly chooses that. The workings of grace, (as oil, to which it is often compared,) insensibly and silently penetrate and sink into the soul, and dilate themselves through it. That word of His own calling disentangles the heart from all its nets, as it did the disciples, to follow Christ. The call that brought St. Matthew presently from his receipt of custom, puts off the heart from all its customs and receipts too; makes it reject gains and pleasures, and all that hinders it, to go after Christ. And it is a call that touches the soul so as the touch of Elijah's mantle, which made Elisha follow him. *Go back*, said he, *for what have I done to you?*[76] Yet he had done so much, as made him forsake all to go with him. And this every believer is most ready to acknowledge, who knows what the rebellion of his heart was, and what his miserable love of darkness was, that the gracious, yet mighty call of God, was that which drew him out of it; and therefore he willingly assents to that which is the Third thing to be spoken of, that it becomes him, as being the end of his calling, *to shew forth His praise*, who has so mercifully, and so powerfully called him from so miserable to so happy an estate.

For, 1. This is God's end in calling us, to communicate His goodness to us, that so the glory of it may return to Himself. The highest Agent cannot work but for the highest end: so that, as the Apostle speaks, when God would confirm His covenant by an oath, *because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself;*[77] so, in all things, He must be the end of His own actions, because there is no greater, nor better end, yea, none by infinite odds so great, or good. Particularly in the calling and exalting of a number of lost mankind to such a great honor and happiness, both in designing that great work, and in performing it, He aims at the opening up and declaring of His rich grace, for the glory of it, as the Apostle St. Paul tells us once and again.[78]

2. As this is God's end, it ought to be ours; and therefore ours because it is His. And for this very purpose, both here and elsewhere, are we reminded of it, that we may be true to His end, and intend it with Him. This is His purpose in calling us, and therefore it is our great duty, being so called—to declare His praises. All things and persons shall pay this tribute, even those who are most unwilling; but the happiness of His chosen is, that they are active in it, others are passive only. Whereas the rest have His praises wrested from them, they declare them cheerfully, as the glorious angels do. As the Gospel brings them glad tidings of peace from God, and declares to them the love and mercy that is in Him, they smother it not, but answer it; they declare it, and set forth the glory of it with their utmost power and skill.

There are two things in this, 1. Not only that they speak upon all occasions to the advantage of His grace, but also that the frame of their actions be such as tends to the exalting of God. And, 2. That in those actions they do intend this end, set up this for their aim.

1. Their words and actions being conformable to that high and holy state to which they are called, do commend and praise their Lord, who has called them to it. The virtues that are in them, tell us of His virtues, as brooks lead us to their springs. When a Christian can quietly repose and trust in God in a matter of very great difficulty, in which there is nothing else to stay him, but God alone, this declares that there is strength enough in God to bear him up, that there must be in Him that real abundance of goodness and truth that the word speaks of Him. Abraham believed, and gave glory to God;[79] this is what a believer can do, to declare the truth of God; he relies on it. He who believes *has set to his seal that God is true*.[80] So, also, their holiness is for His praise. Men hear that there is a God who is infinitely holy, but they can see neither Him nor His holiness; yet, when they perceive some traces of it in the faces of His children, which are in no one else, this may convince them that its perfection, which must be somewhere, can be nowhere else than in their Heavenly Father. When these, which are His peculiar plants, bring forth the fruits of holiness, which naturally they yielded not, it testifies a supernatural work of His hand who planted them, and the more they are fruitful, the greater is His praise. *Herein*, says our Savior, *is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit*.[81] Were it not for the conscience of this duty to God, and possibly the necessity of their station and calling, it may well be, some Christian would rather lock up and keep within himself any grace he has, than let it appear at all, considering some hazards which he and it run in the discovery; and, it may be, could take some pleasure in the world's mistakes and disesteem of him. But seeing both piety and charity require the acting of graces in conduct with men, that which hypocrisy does for itself, a real Christian may, and should do for God.

2. The other thing mentioned as making up this rule, will give the difference; that not only what we speak and do should be in agreement with this end, but that in so speaking and doing, our eye should be upon this end: that all our Christian conduct be directly intended by us, not to cry up our own virtues, but to glorify God, and His virtues,—to declare His praises who has called us.

Let your light, says our Savior, *shine*,[82] and *shine before men* too; that is not forbidden; yea, it is commanded, but it is thus commanded; *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*—yourselves as little as may be, your works more than yourselves, (as the sun gives us its light, and will scarce suffer us to look upon itself,)—*and glorify*—Whom? You? No, but *your Father who is in heaven*. *Let your light shine*, it is given for that purpose, but let it shine always to the glory of the *Father of lights*. Men who seek themselves, may share in the same public kind of actions with you; but let your secret intentions, which God eyes most, sever you. This is the impress that a sincere and humble Christian sets upon all his actions, To the glory of God. He uses all he has, especially all his graces, to His praise who gives all, and is sorry he has no more for this use, and is daily seeking after more, not to bring more esteem to himself, but more honor to God. It is a poor booty to hunt after that, namely, an airy vain breath of men: the best thing in them, their most solid good, is altogether vanity; how much more that which is lightest and vainest in them! This is the mind that is in every Christian, in all his ways to deny himself, and to be willing to abase himself to exalt his Master; to be of St. Paul's temper, who regarded not himself at all, honor or dishonor, prison or liberty, life or death, content with anything, so *Christ* might *be magnified*.[83]

And as every godly mind must be thus affected, so especially the ministers of the Gospel, those who are not only called with others to partake of this *marvelous light*, but are in a special manner to hold it forth to others. How do pure affections become them, and ardent desires to promote His glory who has so called them? A rush for your praise or dispraise; only receive Jesus Christ, and esteem highly of Him, and it is enough. *We preach not ourselves*, says the Apostle, *but Christ Jesus the Lord*.[84] That is our errand, not to catch either at base gain or vain applause for ourselves, but to exalt our Lord Jesus in the hearts of men. And to those who are so minded, there is a reward abiding them, of such riches and honor as they would be very loath to exchange for anything to be had amongst men.

But, in his station, this is the mind of every one who loves the Lord Jesus, most heartily to make a sacrifice of himself, and all he is and has,—means, and esteem, and life, and all, to His glory who humbled Himself so low, to exalt us to these dignities, to make us *kings and priests unto God*.[85]

It is most just, since we have our crowns from Him, and that He has set them on our heads, that we take them in our hands, and throw them down before His throne. All our graces (if we have any) are His free gift, and are given as the rich garments of this spiritual priesthood, only to attire us suitably for this spiritual sacrifice of His praises; the costly vesture of the high priest under the law was not appointed to make him gay for himself, but to decorate him for his holy service, and to commend, as a figure of it, the perfect holiness with which our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, was clothed. What good thing do we have that is not from the hand of our good God? And receiving all from Him, and after a special manner spiritual blessings, is it not reasonable that all we have—those spiritual gifts especially—should declare His praise, and His only? David does not grow big with vain thoughts, and lift up himself, because God has lifted him up, but exclaims, *I will extol you, O Lord; for you have lifted me up*.[86] The visible heavens, and all the beauty and the lights in them, speak nothing but the glory of Him who framed them, as the Psalmist[87] teaches us; and shall not these spiritual lights, His called ones, whom He has made lights so peculiarly for that purpose, these stars in His right hand, do it much more? Oh! let it be thus with us. The more He gives, be all the more humble, and let Him have the return of more glory, and let it go entirely to Him; it is all His due; and in doing thus, we shall still grow richer; for where He sees the most faithful servant, who purloins nothing, but improves all to his Master's advantage, surely, him He will trust with most.

And as it is thus both most due to God, and most profitable for ourselves, in all things to seek His praises; so it is the most excellent and generous intent, to have the same thought with God, the same purpose as His, and to aim no lower than at His glory: whereas it is a base, poor thing for a man to seek himself, far below that royal dignity that is here put upon Christians, and that priesthood joined with it. Under the law, those who were squint-eyed were incapable of the priesthood; truly, this squinting out to our own interest, the looking aside to that, in God's affairs especially, so deforms the face of the soul, that it makes it altogether unworthy the honor of this spiritual priesthood. Oh! this is a large task, an infinite task. The various creatures bear their part in this; the sun says somewhat, and moon and stars, yea, the lowest have some share in it; the very plants and herbs of the field speak of God; and yet, the very highest and best, yea, all of them together, the whole concert of Heaven and earth, cannot show forth all His praise to the full. No; it is but a part, the smallest part of that glory which they can reach.

We all profess these dignities, in that we declare ourselves Christians; but if we are determined to know the truth, (for many, many are deceived in it,) we may, by asking ourselves seriously, and answering truly to these questions: 1st. Whether my actions and the course of my life are such as give evidence of the grace of God, and so speak His praise? If not, surely I am not of this number that God has thus called and dignified. And this test, I fear, would degrade many. 2ndly. If my life is somewhat regular and Christian-like, yet, do I in it all, singly and constantly, without any selfish or sinister end, desire and seek the glory of God alone? Otherwise I may be like this *chosen generation*, but I am not one of them. And this, out of doubt, would make the number yet far less. Well, think on it; it is a miserable condition, for men either to be grossly staining and dishonoring the holy religion they profess, or, in seeming to serve and honor God, to be serving and seeking themselves; it is the way to lose themselves forever. Oh! it is a comfortable thing to have an upright mind, and to love God for Himself; and love seeks not its own things.[88] They are truly happy, who make this their work sincerely, though weakly, to advance the praises of their God in all things, and finding the great imperfection of their best diligence in this work here, are still longing to be where they shall do it better.

1Pe 2:10

Ver. 10. Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

The love of God to His children is the great subject both of His word and of their thoughts, and therefore is it that His word (the rule of their thoughts and their whole lives) speaks so much of that love, to the very end that they may think much, and esteem highly of it, and walk answerably to it. This is the scope of St. Paul's doctrine to the Ephesians, and the top of his desires for them.[89] And this is our Apostle's aim here. As he began the Epistle with contrasting their election in Heaven to their dispersion on earth, the same consideration runs through the whole of it. Here he is representing to them the great fruit of that love, the happy and high state to which they are called in Christ; that the choosing of Christ and of believers is as one act, and they as one entire object of it,—one glorious Temple, He the foundation and head corner-stone, and they the edifice;—one honorable fraternity, He the King of kings and great High Priest, and they likewise through Him made *kings and priests unto God the Father, a royal priesthood;* He *the light of the world, and they through Him children of light*. Now that this their dignity, which shines so bright in its own innate worth, may yet appear the more, the Apostle here sets it off by a double contrast, first, of the misery under which others are, and secondly, of that misery under which they themselves were before their calling. And this being set on both sides, is as a dark shadowing round about their happiness here described, setting off the luster of it.

Their former misery, expressed in the former verse by *darkness*, is here more fully and plainly set before their view in these words. They are borrowed from the prophet Hosea,[90] where (as is usual with the Prophets) he is raised up by the Spirit of God, from the temporal troubles and deliverances of the Israelites, to consider and foretell that great restoration wrought by Jesus Christ, in purchasing a new people to Himself, made up both of Jews and Gentiles who believe; and therefore the prophecy is fit and applicable to both. So that the debate is altogether needless, whether it concerns the Jews or Gentiles; in its spiritual sense, as relating to the kingdom of Christ, it foretells the making of the Gentiles, who were not before so, the people of God, and the recovery of the Jews likewise, who, by their apostasies, and the captivities and dispersions which came upon them as just punishment for those apostasies, were degraded from the outward dignities they had as the people of God, and were also spiritually miserable and captives by nature, and so in both respects laid equal with the Gentiles, and stood as much in need of this restitution as they. St. Paul uses the passage concerning the calling of the Gentiles.[91] And here, St. Peter writing, as is most probable, particularly to the dispersed Jews, applies it to them, as being, in the very reference it bears to the Jews, truly fulfilled only in those who were believers, faith making them a part of the true Israel of God, to which the promises do peculiarly belong; as the Apostle St. Paul argues at large, in the ninth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans.

Their former misery and their present happiness we have here under a double expression; they were, 1. not a people, 2. destitute of mercy. Not the people of God, says the prophet; not a people, says our Apostle: being not God's people, they were so base and miserable as not to be worthy of the name of a people at all; as it is taken Deu 32:21.

There is a kind of being, a life that a soul has by a peculiar union with God, and therefore, in that sense, the soul without God is dead, as the body is without the soul.[92] Yea, as the body, separated from the soul, is not only a lifeless lump, but putrefies, and becomes noxious and abominable, thus the soul, separated from God, is subject to a mere loathsome and vile putrefaction.[93] So that men who are yet unbelievers, *are not* (as the Hebrews expressed death). Multitudes of them *are not a people*, but a heap of filthy carcasses. Again; take our natural misery in the notion of a captivity, which was the judgment threatened against the Jews, to make them not a people; therefore their captivity is often spoken of by the prophets as a death, and their restoration as their resurrection.[94] And as a captive people is civilly dead (as they speak,) so a soul captive to sin and the prince of darkness is spiritually dead, lacking happiness and well-being, which if it never attains, it had better, for itself, not be at all. There is nothing but disorder and confusion in the soul without God, the affections hurrying it tumultuously.

Thus, captive sinners *are not;* they are dead; they lack that happy being that flows from God to the souls which are united to Himself, and consequently, they must lack that society and union with one another which results from the former, from the same union that believers have with God, and the same being in Him; which makes them truly worthy to be called a people, and particularly the people of God. His people are the only people in the world worthy to be called a people; the rest are but refuse and dross. Although in the world's esteem, which judges by its own rules in favor of itself, the people of God are as nobody, no people, a company of silly creatures; yea, *we are made*, says the great Apostle, *as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things;*[95] yet in His account who has chosen them, who alone knows the true value of things, His people are the only people, and all the rest of the world as nothing in His eyes. He dignifies and beautifies them, and loves in them that beauty which He has given them.

But under that term is comprised, not only that new being of believers in each one of them separately, but that tie and union that is amongst them as one people, being incorporated together, and living under the same government and laws, without which a people are but as the beasts of the field, or the *fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them*, as the prophet speaks.[96] That regular living in society and union in laws and policy makes many men to be one people; but the civil union of men in states and kingdoms is nothing comparable to the mysterious union of the people of God with Him, and one with another. That commonwealth has a firmer union than all others. Believers are knit together in Christ as their Head, not merely as a civil or political head ruling them, but as a natural head enlivening them, giving them all one life. Men in other societies, though well ordered, yet are but as a multitude of trees, regularly planted, indeed, but each upon his own root; but the faithful are all branches of one root. Their union is so mysterious that it is compared to the very union of Christ with His Father, as it is indeed the product of it.[97]

People of God.] *I will say to them, You are my people; and they shall say, You are my God*.[98] That mutual interest and possession is the very foundation of all our comfort. He is the first chooser; He first says, *My people;* calls them so, and makes them to be so; and then they say, *My God*. It is, therefore, a relation that shall hold, and shall not break, because it is founded upon His choice who changes not. The tenor of an external covenant with a people (as the Jews particularly found), is such as may be broken by man's unfaithfulness, though God remains faithful and true; but the New Covenant of grace makes all sure on all hands, and cannot be broken; the Lord not only keeping His own part, but likewise performing ours in us, and for us, and establishing us, that as He departs not from us first, so we shall not depart from Him. *I will betroth you unto me forever*.[99] It is an indissoluble marriage, that is not in danger of being broken either by divorce or death.

My people.] There is a treasure of instruction and comfort wrapped up in that word, not only more than the profane world can imagine (for they indeed know nothing at all of it), but more than those who are of that number are able to conceive of,—an unfathomable deep. *My people:* they His portion, and He theirs. He accounts nothing of all the world beside them, and they of nothing at all beside Him. For them He continues the world. Many and great are the privileges of His people, contained in that great charter, the Holy Scriptures, and rich is the land where their inheritance lies; but all is in this reciprocal, that He is their God. All His power and wisdom are engaged for their good. However great and many are their enemies, they may well oppose this to all, He is their God. They are sure to be protected and prospered, and in the end to have full victory. *Happy* then *is that people, whose God is the Lord*.[100]

Which had not obtained mercy.] The mercies of the Lord to His chosen are from everlasting; yet, so long as His decree of mercy runs hidden, and is not revealed to them in the effects of it, they are said not to have received, or obtained mercy. When it begins to act and work in their effectual calling, then they find it to be theirs. It was in a secret way moving forward towards them before, as the sun after midnight is still coming nearer to us, though we perceive not its approach until the dawning of the day.

Mercy.] The former word, *the people of God*, teaches us how great the change is that is wrought by the calling of God: this teaches us, 1. how free it is. *The people of God*—that is the good attained in the change: *obtained mercy*—that is the spring from which it flows. This is indeed implied in the words of the change; of *no people*—such as have no right to such a dignity at all, and in themselves no disposition for it—to be made *His people*, can be by nothing but free grace, such mercy as supposes nothing, and seeks nothing but misery in us, and works upon that. As it is expressed to have been very free to this people of the Jews, in choosing them before the rest of the world,[101] so it is to the spiritual Israel of God, and to everyone particularly belonging to that company. Why is it that He chooses one of a family, and leaves another, but because it pleases Him? He blots out their transgressions for His own name's sake.[102] And, 2. as it is free mercy, so it is tender mercy. The word in the Prophets signifies tenderness, or bowels of compassion; and such are the mercies of our God towards us.[103] The bowels of a father, as it is, Psa 103:13; and if you think not that tenderness enough, those of a mother, yea, more than a mother.[104] 3. It is rich mercy; it delights to glorify itself in the greatest misery; pardons as easily the greatest as the smallest of debts. 4. It is a constant unalterable mercy, a stream still running.

Now in both of these expressions the Apostle draws the eyes of believers to reflect on their former misery, and to view it together with their present state. This is very frequent in the Scriptures.[105] And it is of very great use; it works the soul of a Christian to much humility, and love, and thankfulness, and obedience. It cannot choose but force him to abase himself, and to magnify the free grace and love of God. And this may be one reason why it pleases the Lord to suspend the conversion of some persons for many years of their life, yea, to suffer them to stain those years with grievous and gross sins, that the riches and glory of His grace, and the freeness of His choice, may be the more legible both to themselves and others. Likewise, those apprehensions of the wrath due to sin, and the sights of hell, as it were, which He brings some to, either at, or after their conversion, serve the same purpose. That glorious description of the *New Jerusalem*,[106] is abundantly delightful in itself; and yet the fiery lake spoken of there, makes all that is spoken of the other sound much the sweeter.

But, universally, all the godly have this to consider, that they were strangers and enemies to God, and to think, why was it that I, a lump of the same polluted clay with those that perish, should be taken, and purified, and molded by the Lord's own hand for a vessel of glory? Nothing but free grace makes the difference; and where can there be love, and praises, and service found to answer this? All is to be ascribed to the mercy, gifts, and calling of Christ. And His ministers, with St. Paul, acknowledge that *as we have received mercy, we faint not*.[107]

But alas! we neither enjoy the comfort of this mercy as obtained, nor are grieved for lacking it, nor stirred up to seek after it, if not yet obtained. What do we think? Does it seem a small thing in your eyes to be shut out from the presence of God, and to bear the weight of His wrath forever, that you thus slight His mercy, and let it pass by you ignored? Or shall an imagined obtaining divert you from the real pursuit of it? Will you be willingly deceived, and be your own deceivers in a matter of such great importance? You cannot think too highly of the riches of Divine mercy; it is above all your thoughts; but remember and consider this, that there is a *peculiar people* of His own, to whom alone all the riches of it belong. And therefore, however great it is, unless you find yourselves of that number, you cannot lay claim to the smallest share of it.

And you are not ignorant of their character, what a kind of people they are, who have such a knowledge of God as Himself gives. They are all taught of God, enlightened and sanctified by His Spirit, a holy people, as He is a holy God; they have the riches of that grace by which they are saved, in most precious esteem, and have their hearts by it inflamed with His love, and therefore their thoughts taken up with nothing so much as studying how they may obey and honor Him; rather choosing to displease all the world than to offend Him, and considering nothing too dear, yea, nothing good enough to do Him service. If it is so with you, then you have indeed *obtained mercy*.

But if you can wallow in the same puddle with the profane world, and take a share of their ungodly ways; or if, though your outward carriage be somewhat more smooth, you regard iniquity in your hearts, have your hearts ardent in the love and pursuit of the world, but frozen to God; if you have some bosom idol that you hide and entertain, and cannot find in your heart to part with some one beloved sin, whatever it is, for all the love that God has manifested to man in the Son of His love, Jesus Christ; in a word, if you can please and delight yourself in any way displeasing to God, (though His people, while they are here, have spots, yet these are not the spots of His people that I am now speaking of,) I can give you no assurance that as yet you have obtained mercy: on the contrary, it is certain that the wrath of God is yet abiding on you, and if you continue in this state, you are in apparent danger of perishing under it. You are yet children of spiritual darkness, and on the way to utter and everlasting darkness. Do you know what it is to be destitute of this mercy? It is a woeful state, though you had all worldly enjoyments, and were at the top of outward prosperity, to be shut out from the mercy and love of God.

There is nothing does so kindly work repentance, as the right apprehension of the mercy and love of God. The beams of that love are more powerful to melt the heart than all the flames of mount Sinai—all the threatenings and terrors of the Law. Sin is the root of our misery; and therefore it is the proper work of this mercy, to rescue the soul from it, both from the guilt and the power of it at once. Can you think there is any suitableness in it, that the peculiar people of God should despise His laws, and practise nothing but rebellions? that those in whom He has magnified His mercy, should take pleasure in abusing it? or that He has washed any with the blood of His Son, to the end that they may still wallow in the mire? As if we were redeemed, not from sin, but to sin; as if we should say, *We are delivered to do all these abominations*, as the Prophet speaks.[108] Oh! let us not dare thus to abuse and affront the free grace of God, if we mean to be saved by it; but let as many as would be found amongst those who obtain mercy walk as His people, whose peculiar inheritance is His mercy. And since this grace of God has appeared to us, let us embrace it, and let it effectually teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.[109]

And if you are persuaded to be earnest suitors for this mercy, and to fly unto Jesus, who is the true mercy-seat, then be assured it is yours. Let not the greatest guiltiness scare you and drive you from it; but rather drive you all the more to it; for the greater the weight of that misery is under which you lie, the more is your need of this mercy; and the more will be the glory of it in you. It is a strange kind of argument used by the Psalmist, and yet a sure one—it concludes well and strongly, *for your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity; for it is great*.[110] The soul oppressed with the greatness of its sin lying heavy upon it, may, by that very greatness of it pressing upon it, urge the forgiveness of it at the hands of Free Mercy. It is for Your name's sake,—that makes it strong; the force of the inference lies in that. You are nothing, and worse than nothing. True; but all who ever obtained this mercy were once so; they were nothing of all that which it has made them to be; they were *not a people*, had no interest in God, were strangers of mercy, yea, heirs of wrath; yea, they had not so much as a desire after God, until this mercy stopped them, and showed itself to them, and them to themselves, and so moved them to desire it, and caused them to find it, caught hold on them and plucked them out of the dungeon. And it is unquestionably still the same, and fails not; ever expending and yet never all spent, yea, not so much as at all diminished; flowing, as the rivers, from one age to another, serving each age in the present, and yet not one bit less to those who come after. He who exercises it is *The Lord, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*, to all who come to Him, and yet, still *keeping mercy for thousands who come after*.[111]

You who have obtained this mercy, and have the seal of it within you, it will certainly conform your hearts to its own nature—it will work you to a merciful compassionate temper of mind towards the souls of others who have not yet obtained it. You will, indeed, as the Lord does, hate sin: but, as He does likewise, you will pity the sinner. You will be so far from misconstruing and grumbling at the longsuffering of God, (as if you would have the bridge cut because you are over, as St. Augustine speaks,) that, on the contrary, your great desire will be to draw others to partake of the same mercy with you, knowing it to be rich enough; and you will, in your station, use your best diligence to bring in many to it, from love both to the souls of men and to the glory of God.

And besides, you will still be admiring and extolling this mercy, as it is manifested to yourselves, considering what it is, and what you were before it visited you. The Israelites confessed (at the offering of the first fruits), to set off the bounty of God, *A Syrian ready to perish was my father;*[112] they confessed their captivity in Egypt; but far poorer and baser is our natural condition, and far more precious is that land, to the possession of which this free mercy brings us.

Do but call back your thoughts, you who have indeed escaped it, and look but into that pit of misery from where the hand of the Lord has drawn you out, and you cannot fail to love Him highly, and still kiss that gracious hand, even while it is scourging you with any affliction whatever; because it has once done this for you, namely, plucked you out of everlasting destruction. So David, as the thoughts of this change will teach us to praise, *He brought me up also out of an horrible pit:* then follows,—*He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God;*[113] not only redeemed me from destruction, but also crowned me with glory and honor.[114] He not only forgives all our debts, and let us out of prison, but enriches us with an estate that cannot be spent, and dignifies us with a crown that cannot wither, made up of nothing of ours. These two considerations will stretch and tune the heart very high, namely, from what a low estate grace brings a man, and how high it exalts him; in what a beggarly, vile condition the Lord finds us, and yet, that He does not only free us there, but puts such dignities on us. *He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people*.[115] Or, as Joshua the priest was stripped of his filthy garments, and had a fair miter set upon his head,[116] so too are those of this priesthood dealt with.

Now, that we may be the deeper in the sense and admiration of this mercy, it is indeed our duty to seek earnestly after the evidence and strong assurance of it; for things work on us according to our notice and apprehensions of them, and therefore, the more right assurance we have of mercy, the more love, and thankfulness, and obedience, will spring from it. Therefore it is, that the Apostle here represents this great and happy change of estate to Christians as a thing that they may know concerning themselves, and that they ought to seek the knowledge of, that so they may be duly affected with it. And it is indeed a happy thing, to have in the soul an extract of that great archive and act of grace towards it, which has stood in Heaven from eternity. It is surely both a very comfortable and very profitable thing to find and to read clearly the seal of mercy upon the soul, which is holiness, that by which a man is marked by God, as a part of His peculiar possession that He has chosen out of the world. And when we perceive anything of this, let us look back, as here the Apostle would have us to do, and reflect how God has called us *out of darkness into his marvelous light*.

÷1Pe 2:11

Ver. 11. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

The right spiritual knowledge that a Christian has of God and of himself, differentiates itself from whatever is most like it, by the power and influence it has upon the heart and life. And in this, it has the lively impression of the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures that teaches it; in which we still find throughout, that the high mysteries of religion are accompanied with practical truths, not only as agreeing with them, but as drawn out of them, and not violently drawn, but naturally flowing from them, as pure streams from a pure spring. Thus, in this Epistle, we find the Apostle intermixing his Divine doctrine, with most useful and practical exhortation,[117] and in the beginning of this chapter again: and now in these words.

And upon this model should both the ministers of the Gospel form their preaching, and the hearers their ears. Ministers are not to instruct only, or to exhort only, but to do both. To exhort men to holiness and the duties of a Christian life, without instructing them in the doctrine of faith, and bringing them to Jesus Christ, is to build a house without a foundation. And, on the other side, to instruct the mind in the knowledge of Divine things, and neglect the pressing of that practice and power of godliness which is the undivided companion of true faith, is to forget the building that ought to be raised upon that foundation once laid, which is likewise a point of very great folly. Or, if men, after laying that right foundation, proceed to the superstructure of vain and empty speculations, it is but to build hay and stubble, instead of those solid truths that direct the soul in the way to happiness, which are of more solidity and worth than gold and silver, and precious stones.[118] Christ, and the doctrine that reveals Him, is called by St. Paul, *the mystery of the faith*,[119] and *the mystery of godliness;*[120] as Christ is the object of faith, so is He the spring and fountain of godliness. The Apostle having, we see, in his foregoing discourse unfolded the excellence of Christ and of Christians in Him, proceeds here to exhort them to the pure and spiritual temper of mind and course of life that becomes Christians.

Those hearers are to blame, and do prejudice themselves, who are attentive only to such words and discourse as stir the affections for the present, and find no relish in the doctrine of faith, and the unfolding of those mysteries that bear the whole weight of religion, and are the ground both of all Christian obedience, and all exhortations and persuasives to it. Those temporary, sudden stirrings of the affections, without a rightly informed mind, and some measure of due knowledge of God in Christ, do no good. It is the wind of a word of exhortation that stirs them for the time against their lusts, but the first wind of temptation that comes carries them away; and thus the mind is but tossed to and fro, like a wave of the sea, with all kinds of winds, not being *rooted and established in the faith*, (as it is Col 2:7,) and so, not rooted in *the love of Christ*,[121] which are the conquering graces that subdue unto a Christian his lusts and the world.[122] Love makes a man to be dead to himself, and to the world, and to live to Christ who died for him.

On the other part, they are no less, yea, more to blame, who are glad to have their minds instructed in the mysteries of the Christian faith, and out of a natural desire to know, are curious to hear such things as inform them; but when it comes to the urging of holiness and mortifying their lusts, these are hard sayings,[123]—they had rather there were some way to receive Christ and retain their lusts too, and to bring them to agreement. To hear of the mercies of God, and the dignities of His people in Christ, is very pleasing; but to have this follow upon it, *Abstain from fleshly lusts*, this is an importune, troublesome discourse. But it must be so for all that—those who will share in that mercy and happiness must *abstain from fleshly lusts*.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you.] There is a faculty of reproving required in the ministry, and sometimes a necessity of very sharp rebukes—cutting ones. Those who have much of the spirit of meekness, may have a rod by them too, to use upon necessity.[124] But surely the way of meekness is that they use most willingly, as the Apostle there implies: and out of all question, with ingenuous minds, the mild way of sweet entreaties is very forcible; as oil that penetrates and sinks insensibly, or, (to use that known resemblance,) they prevail as the sunbeams, which, without any noise, made the traveler cast his cloak, which all the blustering of the wind could not do, but made him rather gather it closer, and bind it faster about him. We see the Apostles are frequent in this strain of entreaties, *I beseech you*, as Rom 12:1. Now this word of entreaty is strengthened much by the other, *Dearly beloved*. Scarcely can the harshest reproofs, much less gentle reproofs, be thrown back, which have upon them the stamp of love. That which is known to come from love cannot readily but be so received too. And it is thus expressed for that very purpose, that the request may be the more welcome: *Beloved*. It is the advice of a friend, one that truly loves you, and aims at nothing in it but your good. It is because I love you, that I entreat you, and entreat you as you love yourselves, *to abstain from fleshly lusts, that war against the soul*. And what is our purpose, when we exhort you to believe and repent, but that you may be happy in the forgiveness of your sins? Why do we desire you to embrace Christ, but that through Him you may have everlasting life? However you take these things, it is our duty incessantly to remind you of them; and to do it with much love and tenderness of affection to your souls; not only pressing you by frequent warnings and exhortations, but also by frequent prayers and tears for your salvation.

Abstain.] It was a very wise abridgment that Epictetus made of Philosophy, into those two words, "Bear and forbear." These are truly the two main duties that our Apostle recommends to his Christian brethren in this Epistle. It is one and the same strength of spirit that raises a man above both the troubles and pleasures of the world, and makes him despise and trample upon both.

We have, first, briefly to explain what these *fleshly lusts* mean; then to consider the exhortation of *abstaining* from them.

Unchaste desires are particularly called by this name indeed, but to take it for these only in this place is doubtless too narrow. That which seems to be the true sense of it here takes in all undue desires and use of earthly things, and all the corrupt affections of our carnal minds.

Now in that sense, these *fleshly lusts* comprise a great part of the body of sin. All those three which St. John speaks of, 1 Epist. 2:16, the world's accursed trinity, are included under this name here of *fleshly lusts*. A crew of base, imperious masters they are, to which the natural man is a slave, *serving divers lusts*.[125] Some are more addicted to the service of one kind of lust, some to that of another; but all are in this unhappy, that they are strangers, yea, enemies to God, and, as the brute creatures, servants to their flesh: either covetous, like the beasts of the field, with their eyes still upon the earth, or voluptuous, swimming in pleasures, as fishes in the sea, or like the fowls of the air, soaring in vain ambition. All the strifes that are raised about these things, all malice and envyings, all bitterness and evil speaking,[126] which are works of the flesh, and tend to the satisfying of its wicked desires, we are here entreated to abstain from.

To abstain from these lusts is to hate and flee from the very thoughts and first motions of them; and if surprised by these, yet to kill them there, that they bring not forth; and to suspect ourselves even in those things that are not sinful, and to keep afar away from all inducements to those polluted ways of sin.

In a word, we are to abstain not only from the serving of our flesh in things forbidden, as unjust gain or unlawful pleasures, but also from immoderate desire of, and delighting in, any earthly thing, although it may be in itself lawfully, yea, necessarily, in some degree, desired and used. Yea, to have any feverish, pressing thirst after gain, even just gain, or after earthly delights, though lawful, is to be guilty of those fleshly lusts, and a thing very unbecoming the dignity of a Christian. To see those who *were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills*[127] is a strange sight. Therefore the Apostle, having so cleared that immediately before, has the better reason to require this of them, that they *abstain from fleshly lusts*.

Let their own slaves serve them: you are redeemed and delivered from them, a free people, yea, kings; and suits it with royal dignity to obey vile lusts? You are priests consecrated to God, and will you tumble yourselves and your precious garments yourselves in the mire? It was a high speech of a heathen, that he was greater, and born to greater things, than to be a servant to his body. How much more ought he that is born again to say so, being born heir to *a crown that fades not away!*[128]

Again, as the honor of a Christian's estate is far above this baseness of serving his lusts, so the happiness and pleasantness of his estate set him above the need for the pleasures of sin. The Apostle said before, If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, desire the sincere milk of the word[129]—desire that word wherein you may taste more of His graciousness. And as that exhortation fitly urges the appetite's desire of the word, so it is strong to persuade to this abstinence from fleshly lusts; yea, to the disdain and loathing of them. If you have the least experience of the sweetness of His love, if you have but tasted of the crystal river of His pleasures, the muddy puddle-pleasures of sin will be hateful and loathsome to you: not only so, but the best earthly delights that there are, will be disrelished, and will seem unsavory to your taste. The embittering of the breasts of the world to the godly by afflictions does something indeed towards weaning them from them; but the breasts of consolation that are given them in their stead wean much more effectually.

The true reason why we remain servants to these lusts, some to one, some to another, is, because we are still strangers to the love of God, and those pure pleasures that are in Him. Though the pleasures of this earth are poor and low, and most unworthy of our pursuit, yet as long as men know of nothing better, they will stick by those they have, such as they are. The Philosopher gives this as the reason why men are so much set upon sensual delights, because they know not the higher pleasures that are proper to the soul; and they must have it some way. It is too often in vain to speak to men in this strain, to follow them with the Apostle's entreaty, *I beseech you, abstain from fleshly lusts*, unless those who are spoken to are such as he speaks of in the former words, such as *have obtained mercy*, and have tasted of the graciousness and love of Christ, whose *love is better than wine*.[130] Oh that we would seek the knowledge of this love! because, seeking it, we will find it; and finding it, we would need no force to pull the delights of sin out of our hands; we would throw them away of our own accord.

Thus a carnal mind prejudices itself against religion, when it hears that it requires an abstinence from fleshly lusts, and bereaves men of their mirth and delight in sin; but they know not that it is to make way for more refined and precious delights. There is nothing of this kind taken from us, but by a very advantageous exchange it is made up. In the world you shall have affliction, but in me you shall have peace. Is not lack of the world's peace abundantly paid with peace in Christ? Thus, fleshly lusts are cast out of the hearts of believers as rubbish and trash, to make room for spiritual comforts. We are forbidden fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, to the end that we may have fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ.[131] This is to make men eat angels' food indeed, as was said of the manna.[132] The serving of the flesh sets man below himself, down amongst the beasts; but the consolations of the Spirit, and communion with God, raise him above himself, and associate him with the angels. But let us speak to the Apostle's own exhortations against these lusts, taken, 1. From the condition of Christians; 2. From the condition of those lusts.

1. From the condition of Christians: *As strangers*. These dispersed Jews were strangers scattered in various countries; but that is not intended here: they are called strangers in the spiritual sense that applies in common to all the Saints. Possibly, by calling them so, he alludes to their outward dispersion, but means their spiritual alienation from the world, and interest in the New Jerusalem.

And this he uses as a very pertinent enforcement of his exhortation. Whatever others do, the serving of the flesh and love of the world are most inconsistent and unbecoming in you. Consider who you are. If you were citizens of this world, then you might drive the same trade with them, and follow the same lusts; but considering that you are chosen and called out of this world, and invested into a new society, made free of another city, and are therefore merely travelers here, passing through to your own country, it is very reasonable that there should be this difference between you and the world—that while they live as at home, your behavior is such as suits strangers; not glutting yourselves with their pleasures, nor surfeiting upon their delicious fruits, as some unwary travelers do abroad, but as wise strangers, living warily and soberly, and still minding most of all your journey homewards, suspecting dangers and snares on your way, and so walking with holy fear (as the Hebrew word for stranger means).

There is, indeed, a miserable party even within a Christian—the remainder of corruption—that is no stranger here, and therefore keeps friendship and correspondence with the world, and will readily betray him if he doesn't watch out. So that he is not only to flee from the pollutions of the world that are all around him, and to choose his steps that he will not become ensnared from without, but he is to continually guard against the lusts and corruption that are yet within himself, to curb and control his own lusts, and give them resolute and flat refusals when they solicit him, and to stop up their essays and opportunities of fellowship with the world, and such things as nourish them, and so to do what he can to starve them out of the holds they keep within him, and to strengthen that new nature which is in him; to live and act according to it, though, in doing so, he shall be sure to live as a stranger here, and a despised, mocked, and hated stranger.

And it is not, on the whole, the worse that it should be so. If men in foreign countries are prone to forget their own at any time, it is surely when they are most kindly used abroad, and are most at their ease—and thus a Christian may be in some danger when he is best accommodated, and has most of the smiles and caresses of the world: so that though he can never wholly forget his home that is above, yet his thoughts of it will be less frequent, and his desires for it less earnest, and, it may be, he may insensibly slide into its customs and habits, as men will do that are well seated in some other country. But by the troubles and unfriendliness of the world he gains this—that when they abound most upon him he then feels himself a stranger, and remembers to behave himself as such, and thinks often with much delight and strong desires on his own country, and the rich and sure inheritance that lies there, and the ease and rest he shall have when he gets there.

And this will strongly persuade him to flee from all polluted ways and lusts as fast as the world follows them. It will make him abhor the pleasures of sin, and use the allowable enjoyments of this earth warily and moderately, never engaging his heart to them as worldlings do, but always keeping it free,—free from that earnest desire in the pursuit of worldly things, and the deep delight in obtaining them, which the men of the earth bestow on them. There is a diligence in his calling, and a prudent regard of his affairs, that is not only permitted to a Christian, but required of him. But yet, compared to his great and *high calling* (as the Apostle calls it, Php 3:14), he follows all his other business with a kind of coldness and indifference, as not caring very much which way they go; his heart is elsewhere. The traveler provides himself as he can with entertainment and lodging where he comes; if it be commodious, it is well; but if not, it is no great matter. If he finds only the essentials, he can go without delicacies very well; for where he finds them in his way, he neither can, nor if he could, would choose to stay there. Though his inn were furnished with the richest hangings and furniture, yet it is not his home—he must and would leave it. The character of ungodly men is that they *mind earthly things;*[133] they are drowned in them over head and ears, as we say.

If Christians would consider how little, and for how little a while, they are concerned in anything here, they would go through any state and any changes of state, either to the better or the worse, with very composed, equal minds, always moderate in their necessary cares, and never taking any care at all for the flesh, *to fulfil the lusts thereof*.[134] Let those who have no better home than this world lay claim to live here as at home, and serve their lusts; those who have all *their portion in this life*[135]—no more good to look for than what they can catch here—let them take their time of the poor profits and pleasures that are here; but you who have your whole estate, all your riches and pleasures laid up in Heaven, and reserved there for you, let your hearts be there, and your conversation there. This is not the place of your rest, nor of your delights, unless you would be willing to change, and to have your good things here, as some foolish travelers, who spend the estate they should live on at home, in a little while, braving it abroad amongst strangers. Will you, with profane Esau, sell your birthright for a mess of pottage,—sell eternity for a moment, and such pleasures, as a moment of them is worth more than an eternity of the other?

2. The Apostle argues from the condition of those lusts. It is argument enough against *fleshly lusts which war against the soul*, that they are so far below the soul, that they cannot content, no, nor at all reach the soul; they are not a suitable, much less a satisfying good to it. Although sin has unspeakably abused the soul of man, yet its excellent nature and original still causes a vast disproportion between it and all those gross base things of the earth that concern the flesh, and go no further. But this isn't all: these fleshly lusts are not only of no benefit to the soul, but they are its pernicious enemies—*they war against it.* And their war against it is entirely made up of stratagem and sleight; for they cannot hurt the soul but by itself. They promise it some contentment, and so gain its consent to serve them, and undo itself. They embrace the soul in order to strangle it. The soul is too much diverted from its own proper business by the inevitable and incessant necessities of the body; and therefore it is exceedingly unjust and cruel to make it also serve the extravagant and sinful desires of the flesh: so much time for sleep, and so much for eating and drinking, and dressing and undressing; and by many, the greatest part of the time that remains is spent in laboring and providing for these. Look at the employments of most men: all the labor of the husbandmen in the country, and of tradesmen in the city, the multitudes of shops and callings, what is the purpose of them all, but the interest and service of the body? And in all these the immortal soul is drawn down to drudge for the mortal body, the house of clay in which it dwells. And in the sense of this, those souls that truly know and consider themselves in this condition often groan under the burden, and desire the day of their deliverance. But the service of the flesh in the inordinate lusts of it is a point of far baser slavery and indignity to the soul, and not only diverts it from spiritual things for the time, but habitually indisposes it to every spiritual work, and makes it earthly and sensual, and so unfits it for heavenly things. Where these lusts, or any one of them, have dominion, the soul cannot at all perform any good; can neither pray, nor hear, nor read the word rightly; and in so far as any of them prevail upon the soul of a child of God, they disjoint and disable it for holy things. Although they are not of the grossest kind of lusts, but such things as are scarcely taken notice of in a man, either by others or by his own conscience, some irregular desires or entanglements of the heart, yet, these little foxes will destroy the vines;[136] they will prey upon the graces of a Christian, and keep them very low. Therefore it concerns us much to study our hearts, and to be exact in calling to account the several affections that are in them; otherwise, even those who have been called of God, and have obtained mercy (for such the Apostle speaks to), may have such lusts within them as will much abate the flourishing of their graces and the spiritual beauty of the soul.

The godly know from sad experience that their own hearts often deceive them, harboring and hiding those things that greatly deprive them of that liveliness of grace, and those comforts of the Holy Ghost, which otherwise they would be very likely to attain to.

This *warring against the soul*, which means their mischievous and hurtful nature, has this also included under it, that these lusts, as breaches of God's law, subject the soul to His wrath. So that by this, the Apostle might well urge his point. Besides that these lusts are unworthy of you, the truth is, if you Christians serve your lusts, you kill your souls.[137]

When men are on their deathbeds, about to enter eternity, consider what they then think of all their moiling [hard work] on the earth, and serving their own hearts and lusts in any kind—when they see that of all these ways nothing remains but the guiltiness of their sin, the accusations of their conscience, and the wrath of God.

Oh! that you would be persuaded to esteem your precious souls, and not wound them as you do, but war for them, against all those lusts *that war against the soul*. The soul of a Christian is doubly precious, being, besides its natural excellence, ennobled by grace, and so twice descended of Heaven; and therefore it deserves better treatment than to be turned into a scullion to serve the flesh. The service of Jesus Christ is that which alone is fitting to it; it is alone honorable for the soul to serve so high a Lord, and its service is due only to Him who bought it at so high a rate.

÷1Pe 2:12

Ver. 12. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

These two things that a natural man makes least account of, are of all things in highest regard with a Christian—his own soul and God's glory: so that there are no stronger incentives to him in anything than the interests of these two. And by these the Apostle urges his present exhortation to holiness and blamelessness of life. For the substance of his advice or request in this and the former verse is the same: a truly honest conversation is that only which is spiritual, not defiled with the carnal lusts and pollutions of the world.

The abstention from those lusts indeed comprehends, not only the rule of outward behavior, but the inward temper of the mind; whereas this *honest conversation* more expressly concerns our external conduct amongst men; as it is added, *honest among the Gentiles*, and so tending to the glory of God. So these two are to be inseparably regarded—the inward disposition of our hearts, and the outward conversation and course of our lives.

I shall speak to the former first, as the spring of the latter. *Keep your heart with all diligence*,—all depends upon that,—*for out of it are the issues of life*.[138] And if so, then the regulation of the tongue, and eyes, and feet, and all will follow, as there it follows, ver. 24: *Put away from you a froward mouth*. In order for the impure streams to cease running, the corrupt spring must be dried up. Men may convey them in a close and concealed manner, making them run, as it were, underground, as they do vaults and ditches (*sentinas et cloacas*); but until the heart is renewed and purged from base lusts, it will still be sending forth, some way or other, the streams of iniquity. *As a fountain casts out her waters* incessantly, *so she casts out her wickedness*, says the Prophet, of the very people and city that were called holy, by reason of the ordinances of God and the profession of the true religion that was amongst them: and therefore it is the same Prophet's advice from the Lord, *O Jerusalem, wash your heart. How long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?*[139]

This is the true method, according to our Savior's doctrine, Make the tree good, and then the fruits will be good; not until then; for who can *gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*[140] Some good outward actions avail nothing, the soul being unrenewed; as you may stick some figs, or hang some clusters of grapes upon a thorn bush, but they cannot grow upon it.

In this men deceive themselves, even those who have some thoughts of amendment; when they fall into sin, and are reproved for it, they say (and possibly think so too), "I will take heed to myself, I will be guilty of this no more." And because they go no deeper, many of them are ensnared in the same kind again; but however, if they never commit that same sin, they merely change it for some other: as a current of waters, if you stop their passage one way, they rest not until they find another. The conversation can never be uniformly and entirely good, until the frame of the heart, the affections and desires that lodge in it, be changed. It is naturally *an evil treasure*[141] of impure lusts, and must in some way vent and spend what it has within. It is to begin with the wrong end of your work, to rectify the outside first, to smooth the conversation, and not first of all purge the heart. Evil affections are the source of evil speeches and actions. *From whence come wars and fightings among you?* says St. James. *Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*[142] Unquiet, unruly lusts within are the cause of the unquietnesses and contentions abroad in the world. One man will have his corrupt will, and another his, and thus they shock and jostle one another; and by the cross encounters of their purposes, as flints meeting, they strike out those sparks that set all on fire.

So then, according to the order of the Apostle's exhortation, the only true principle of all good and Christian conversation in the world is the mortifying of all earthly and sinful lusts in the heart. While they have possession of the heart, they clog it, and straiten it towards God and His ways, so that it cannot walk constantly in them; but when the heart is freed from them, it is enlarged, and so, as David speaks, fits a man, not only to walk, but to run the way of God's commandments.[143] And without this freeing of the heart, a man will be at the best very uneven and inconsistent in his ways,—one step like a Christian, and another like a worldling; which is an unpleasant and unprofitable way, not according to that word, *He makes my feet like hinds' feet*,[144]—sets them even, as the word is, not only swift, but straight and even; and that is what is required here, the whole course and revolution of a Christian's life to be like himself. And that it may be so, the whole body of sin, and all the members of it, all the deceitful lusts, must be crucified.[145]

In the words there are three things. I. One point of a Christian's ordinary entertainment in the world, *to be evil spoken of.* II. Their good use of that evil, *to do the better for it.* III. The good end and the certain effect of their so doing, *the glory of God*.

I. *Whereas they speak against you as evil doers*.] This is in the general the disease of man's corrupt nature, and argues much the baseness and depravedness of it,—this propensity to evil speaking one of another, either blotting the best actions with misconstructions, or taking doubtful things by the left ear; not choosing the most favorable, but, on the contrary, the very harshest sense that can be put upon them. Some men take more pleasure in the narrow eyeing of the true and real faults of men, and then speak of them with a kind of delight. All these kinds of evil speakings are such fruits as spring from that bitter root of pride and self-love, which is naturally deep, fastened in every man's heart. But, besides this general bent to evil speaking, there is a particular malice in the world against those who are *born of God*, which must have vent in calumnies and reproaches. If this evil speaking be the hissing that is natural to the serpent's seed, surely because of their natural antipathy, it must be breathed forth most against the *seed of the woman*, those who are one with Jesus Christ. If the *tongues* of the ungodly are *sharp swords*[146] even to one another, they will *whet them* sharper than ordinary when they are to use them against the righteous, to wound their name. The evil tongue must be always burning, that *is set on fire of hell*, as St. James speaks;[147] but against the godly, it will be sure to be heated seven times hotter than it is for others. The reasons for this are, 1. Being naturally haters of God, and yet unable to reach Him, what wonder is it if their malice vents itself against His image in His children, and labors to blot and stain all that they can with the foulest calumnies? 2. Because they are neither able nor willing themselves to attain to the spotless, holy life of Christians, they bemire them, and would make them like themselves, by false aspersions: they cannot rise to the state of the godly, and therefore they endeavor to draw them down to theirs by detraction. 3. The reproaches they cast upon the professors of pure religion they mean mainly against religion itself; and intend them to reflect upon it.

The evil speakings of the world against pious men professing religion are partly gross falsehoods, invented without the least ground or appearance of truth; for the world, ever inclined to believe evil reports, especially upon so deep a prejudice as it has against the godly, the falsest and most absurd calumnies will always find so much belief as to make them odious, or very suspected at least, to those who know them not. This is the world's maxim, Lie confidently, and it will always do something; as a stone taken out of the mire and thrown against a white wall won't stick, but rebounds presently back again, yet it leaves a spot behind it. The primitive Christians were charged with these kinds of evil speakings, even with gross and horrible falsehoods, as all know, who know anything of the history of those times; even such things were reported of them as the worst of wicked men would scarcely be guilty of. The devil, as witty [crafty] as he is, makes use, again and again, of his old inventions, and makes them serve in several ages; for so were the Waldenses accused of inhuman banquetings and beastly promiscuous uncleanness, and various things not once to be named among Christians, much less to be practiced by them. So that it is no new thing to meet with the most impure, vilest slanders, as the world's reward for holiness and the practice of pure religion.

Then again, consider how much more the wicked will insult the least true blemishes that they can find amongst the professors of godliness. And in this there is a threefold injury very ordinary; 1. Strictly to pry into, and maliciously to object against Christians, the smallest imperfections and frailties of their lives, as if they pretended to and promised absolute perfection. They do indeed exercise themselves (such as are Christians indeed) with St. Paul, *to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men;*[148] they have a regard to all God's commandments, as David speaks; they have a sincere love for God, which makes them study the most exact obedience they can reach; and this is an imperfect kind of perfection; it is evangelical, but not angelical. 2. Men are apt to impute the scandalous falls of some particular Christians to the whole number. It is a very short incompetent rule, to make judgment of any one man himself by one action, much more to measure all the rest of the same profession by it. And yet they proceed further in this way of misjudging. 3. They impute the personal failings of men to their religion, and disparage it because of the faults of those who profess it; which, as the ancients plead well, is the greatest injustice, and such as they would not be guilty of against their own philosophers. They could well distinguish between their doctrine and the manners of some of their followers, and so they ought to have dealt with Christians too. They ought to have considered their religion in itself, and the doctrine that it teaches, and if they found it vicious, the blame would have been just; but if it taught nothing but holiness and righteousness, then the blame for any unholiness or unrighteousness found amongst Christians ought to rest upon the persons themselves who were guilty of it, and not to be stretched to the whole number of professors, much less to the religion that they professed. And yet this is still the custom of the world upon the least failing they can find in the godly, or those who seem to be so; much more with open mouth do they revile religion upon any gross sin in any of its professors.

But considering that this is the very character of a profane mind, and the badge of the enemies of religion, beware of sharing in the least with them in it. Don't easily entertain the reports of profane or of mere civil men against the professors of religion; they are undoubtedly partial, and their testimony may be justly suspected. Don't lend them a ready ear to receive their evil speakings, much less your tongue to divulge them, and spread them further; not only so, but be sure that you take no pleasure in even the least scoffs against the sincerity and power of religion. And, all of you who desire to walk as Christians, be very wary that you do not wrong one another, and help not the wicked against you, by your mutual misconstructions and misjudgments of one another. Far be it from you to take pleasure in hearing others spoken evil of; whether unjustly or though deserved in some way, yet let it be always grievous to you, and in no way pleasing to hear such things, much less to speak of them. It is the Devil's delight to be pleased with evil speakings. The Syrian calls him an *Akal Kartza* (Eater of slanders or calumnies). They are a dish that pleases his palate, and men are naturally fond of his diet. In Psa 35:16, there is a word that is rendered *mockers in feasts* or *feasting-mockers*—persons who feasted men's ears at their meetings with speaking of the faults of others scoffingly, and therefore shared with them of their cakes, or feasts, as the word is. But to a renewed Christian mind, which has a new taste, and all its senses new, there is nothing more unsavory than to hear the defaming of others, especially of those who profess religion. If the law of love possessed our hearts, it would regulate both the ear and tongue, and make them most tender of the name of our brethren: it would teach us the faculty of covering their infirmities, and judging favorably, taking always the best side and most charitable sense of their actions: it would teach us to blunt the fine edge of our censures upon ourselves, our own hard hearts and rebellious wills within, so that they might no longer remain sharp against others than is necessary for their good.

And this would cut short those who are without from a great deal of provisions of evil speaking against Christians, which they are often furnished with by Christians themselves, through their uncharitable carriage one towards another. However, this being the hard measure that they always find in the world, it is their wisdom to consider it rightly, and to study that good which, according to the Apostle's advice, may be extracted out of it; and that is the second thing to be spoken to.

II. *Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles*.] As the sovereign power of drawing good out of evil resides in God, and argues His primitive goodness, so He teaches His own children some faculty this way, that they may resemble Him in it. He teaches them to draw sweetness out of their bitterest afflictions, and an increase of inward peace from their outward troubles. And as these buffetings of the tongue are no small part of their sufferings, so they reap no small benefit by them in many ways—particularly in this one, that they order their conversation the better, and walk the more exactly for it.

And this, no doubt, in Divine Providence, is intended and ordered for their good, as are all their other trials. The sharp censures and evil speakings that a Christian is surrounded by in the world, is none other than a hedge of thorns set on every side, so that he doesn't go out of his way, but keeps straight on in it between them, not declining to the right hand nor to the left; whereas if they found nothing but the favor and good opinion of the world, they might, as in a way unhedged, be subject to expatiate and wander out into the meadows of carnal pleasures that are about them, which would call and allure them, and often divert them from their journey.

And thus it might happen that Christians would deserve censure and evil speakings all the more, if they did not usually suffer them undeserved. This, then, turns into a great advantage to them, making their conduct more answerable to those two things that our Savior joins, *watch and pray;*[149] causing them to be more vigilant over themselves, and more earnest with God for His watching over them and conducting of them. *Because of my enemies, make your way straight before my face*,[150] says David: the word is *my observers*, or those who scan my ways, every foot of them; who examine them as a verse, or as a song of music; if there is but a wrong measure in them, they will not let it slip, but will be sure to point it out.

And if the enemies of the godly wait for their halting, shall they not scan their own paths themselves, that they may not halt, and examine them to order them, as the wicked do to censure them; and so depend wholly upon the Spirit of God as their guide, to lead them into all truth,[151] and to teach them to order their conversation rightly,[152] that it may be all of one piece, holy and blameless, and still like itself?

Honest.] Fair or beautiful: the same word fitly signifies goodness and beauty, for that which is the truest and most lasting beauty grows fresher in old age, as the Psalmist speaks of the righteous, *that be planted in the house of the Lord*.[153] Could the beauty of virtue be seen, said Plato, it would draw all to love it. A Christian holy conversation has such a beauty, that when those who are strangers to it begin to discern it at all correctly, they cannot choose but to love it; and where it begets not love, yet it silences calumny, or at least evinces its falsehood.

The goodness or beauty of a Christian's conversation consists in symmetry and conformity to the word of God as its rule—he ought diligently to study that rule, and to square his ways by it; not to walk at random, but to apply that rule to every step at home and abroad, and to be as careful of the beauty of his ways, to keep that unspotted, as those women are of their faces and attire who are most studious of comeliness.

We who call ourselves Christians are so far from this strict consideration of our conversation, that the greater part not only have many foul spots, but they themselves, and all their ways, are nothing but defilement, all one spot; as our Apostle calls them, *spots they are and blemishes*.[154] And even those who are Christians indeed, yet are not as watchful and accurate in all their ways as becomes them, but stain their *holy profession* either with pride, or covetousness, or contentions, or some other such like unattractiveness.

Therefore, let us all, be more resolved to study this good and comely conversation that Apostle here exhorts to, that it may be such as *becomes the Gospel of Christ;* as St. Paul desires his Philippians.[155] And if you live amongst profane persons, who will be to you as the unbelieving Gentiles were to those believing Jews who lived amongst them, traducers of you, and given to speak evil of you, and of religion in you, trouble not yourselves with many apologies and clearings when you are evilly spoken of, but let the track of your life answer for you, your *honest and blameless conversation:* that will be the shortest, and most real and effectual way of confuting all obloquies; as when one in the schools was proving by a sophistical argument, that there could be no motion, the philosopher answered it fully and shortly by rising up and walking. If you would pay them home, this kind of revenge is not only permissable, but recommended to you; be avenged on evil speakings by well doing, shame them from it. It was a king that said, It was kingly to do well, and be ill spoken of. Well may Christians acknowledge it to be true, when they consider that it was the lot of their King, Jesus Christ; and well may they be content, considering He has made them likewise *kings* (as we heard, ver. 9), to be conformable to Him in this too, this kingly way of suffering, to be unjustly evil-spoken of, and still to go on in doing more good; always aiming in so doing (as our Lord did) at the glory of our Heavenly Father. This is the third thing.

III. *That they may glorify God in the day of visitation*.] He says not, They shall praise or commend you, but *shall glorify God*. In whatever way this time, this *day of visitation*, be taken, the effect itself is this, *They shall glorify God*. It is this that the Apostle still holds before their eye, and that upon which a Christian willingly sets his eye, and keeps it fixed on all his ways. He does not teach them to be sensible of their own esteem as it concerns themselves, but only as the glory of their God is interested in it. Were it not for this, a generous-minded Christian could set a very light rate upon all the thoughts and speeches of men concerning him, whether good or bad; and could easily drown all their mistakes in the conscience of the favor and approbation of his God. *It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: he that judges me is the Lord*.[156] Man has a day of judging, but it, and his judgment with it, soon passes away; but God has His day, and it, together with His sentence, abides forever, as the Apostle there adds. As if he should say, I appeal to God; but considering that the religion he professes, and the God whom he worships in that religion, are wronged by those reproaches, and that the slanders cast upon Christians reflect upon their Lord,—this is the thing that makes him sensible; he feels on that side only. *The reproaches of those who reproached you are fallen upon me*,[157] says the Psalmist: and this makes a Christian desire to vindicate, even to men, his religion and his God, without regard to himself; because he may say, The reproaches of those who reproach only me have fallen upon you.

This is his intention in the holiness and integrity of his life, that God may be glorified; this is the axis about which all this good conversation moves and turns continually.

And he who forgets this, let his conversation be never so plausible and spotless, knows not what it is to be a Christian. As they say of the eagles, who try their young ones whether they are of the right kind or not, by holding them before the sun, and if they can look steadfastly upon it, they own them, if not, they throw them away: this is the true evidence of an upright and real Christian, to have a steadfast eye on the glory of God, the *Father of lights*.[158] In all, let God be glorified, says the Christian, and that suffices: that is the sum of his desires. He is far from glorying in himself, or seeking to raise himself, for he knows that of himself he is nothing, but by the free grace of God he is what he is.[159] "Whence any glorying to you, rottenness and dust?" says St. Bernard. "Whence is it to you if you are holy? Is it not the Holy Spirit that has sanctified you? If you could work miracles, though they were done by your hand, yet it were not by your power, but by the power of God."

To the end that my glory may sing praise to you,[160] says David. Whether his tongue, or his soul, or both, are meant, what he calls his glory he shows us, and what use he has for it, namely, to give the Lord glory, to sing His praises, and that then it was truly David's glory when it was so employed, in giving glory to Him, whose peculiar due glory is. What do we have to do in the world as His creatures, once and again His creatures, His new creatures, *created unto good works*,[161] but to exercise ourselves in those, and by those to advance His glory, that all may return to Him from whom all is, as the rivers run back to the sea from whence they came? *Of him, and through him,* and therefore, *to him, are all things*, says the Apostle, Rom 11:36. Those who serve base gods seek how to advance and aggrandize them. The covetous man studies to make his *Mammon* as great as he can, all his thoughts and pains run upon that service, and so do the voluptuous and ambitious for theirs; and shall not those who profess themselves to be the servants of the Only Great and the Only True God, have their hearts much more, at least as much possessed with desires of honoring and exalting *Him?* Should not this be their predominant design and thought: —What way shall I most advance the glory of my God? How shall I, who am engaged more than them all, set in with the heavens and the earth, and the other creatures, to declare His excellence, His greatness, and His goodness?

In the day of visitation.] The beholding of your good works may work this in them, that they may be gained to acknowledge and embrace that religion, and that God, which for the present they reject; but that it may be thus, they must be visited with that same light and grace from above, which has sanctified you. This, I conceive, is the sense of this word, though it may be, and is taken various other ways by interpreters. Possibly, in this *day of visitation* is implied the clearer preaching of the Gospel amongst those Gentiles, where the preaching Jews dwelt; and that when they should compare the light of that doctrine with the light of their lives, and find the agreement between them, that might be helpful to their effectual calling, and so they might glorify God. But to the end that they might do thus indeed, there must be, along with the word of God, and the good works of His people, a particular visitation of their souls by the Spirit of God. Your good conversation may be one good means of their conversion; therefore this may be a motive to that; but to make it an effectual means, this day of gracious visitation must dawn upon them; *the day-spring from on high* must visit them, as it is Luk 1:78.

÷1Pe 2:13-14

Ver. 13. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king as supreme;

Ver. 14. Or unto governors, as unto those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do well.

It is one of the most false, and yet one of the most common prejudices that the world has always entertained against true religion, that it is an enemy to civil power and government. The adversaries of the Jews charged this fault upon their city, the then seat of the true worship of God.[162] The Jews charged it upon the preachers of the Christian religion,[163] as they pretended the same quarrel against Christ Himself. And generally, the enemies of the Christians in the primitive times loaded them with the slander of rebellion and contempt of authority. Therefore our Apostle, descending to particular rules of Christian life, by which it may be blameless, and silence slander, begins with this, not only as a thing of prime importance in itself, but as particularly suitable for those he wrote to, being at once both Jews and Christians, for the clearing of themselves and their religion: *Submit yourselves*, &c.

There are in the words various particulars to be considered, all concurring to press this main duty of obedience to Magistrates, not only as well consistent with true religion, but as indeed inseparable from it. Not to parcel out the words into many pieces, they might, I think, be all not inappropriately comprised under these two: I. The extent of this duty; II. The ground of it.

I. The extent of the duty, viz. To all civil power, of whatever kind, for the time received and authorized; there being no need of questioning what was the rise and original of civil power, either in the nature of it, or in the persons of those who are in possession of it. For if you will trace them quite through in the succession of ages, and narrowly eye their whole circle, there are few crowns in the world, in which there will not be found some crack or other, more or less. If you look at those great monarchies in Daniel's vision, you see one of them built up upon the ruins of another; and all of them represented by terrible devouring beasts of monstrous shape. And whether the Roman Empire be the fourth there, as many take it, or not, yet, in the things spoken about that fourth, as well as of the rest, it is inferior to none of them, enlarging itself by conquests in all parts of the world. And under it were the provinces to which this epistle is addressed; yet the Apostle enjoins his brethren subjection and obedience to its authority.

Nor is it a question so to be moved as to suspend, or at all abate, our obedience to that which possesses in the present where we live, what form of government is most just and commodious.

God has indeed been more express in the officers and government of His own house, His Church; but civil societies He has left at liberty, in the choosing and modeling of civil government, though always, indeed, overruling their choice and changes in that, by the secret hand of His wise and powerful providence. Yet He has set them no particular rule pertaining to the frame of it; only that the common rule of equity and justice ought to be regarded, both in the contriving and managing of government. Nevertheless, though it be some way defective in both, those who are subject to it are in all things lawful to submit to its authority, whether supreme or subordinate; as we have it here expressly, *Whether to the king, as supreme*, (namely, to the Emperor,) or *unto governors sent by him;*—which, though a judicious interpreter refers to God, and will not admit of any other sense, yet it seems most suitable both to the words, and to the nature of the government of those provinces, to take that word *to him* as relating to the king; for the expression, *those who are sent*, answers to the other, *the king as supreme*, and so is a very clear designation of the inferior governors of those times and places. And whatever the purpose of those who sent them, and their administrators who were sent, that which the Apostle adds expresses the reason why they should be sent to govern, and what they should aim at in governing, as the true end of all government. And though they were not fully true to that end in their deportment, but possibly did many things unjustly, yet, as God has ordained authority for this end, there is always so much justice in the most depraved government, as is a public good, and therefore puts upon inferiors an obligation to obedience: and this leads us to consider,

II. The ground of this duty. The main ground of submitting to human authority, is the interest that Divine authority has in it, God having both appointed civil government as a common good amongst men, and particularly commanded His people to obey it, as a particular good to them, and a thing very suitable with their profession—it is *for the Lord's sake*. This word carries the whole weight of the duty, and is a counterbalance to the former, which seems to be therefore on purpose so expressed, that this may answer it. Although civil authority, in regard of particular forms of government, and the choice of particular persons to govern, is but a human ordinance, or man's creature, as the word is, yet, both the good of government, and the duty of subjection to it, are God's ordinance; and therefore, for His sake *submit yourselves*.

(1.) God has in general instituted civil government for the good of human society, and there is still good in it. Tyranny is better than anarchy. (2.) It is by His providence that men are advanced to places of authority.[164] (3.) It is His command that obedience be yielded to them.[165] And the consideration of this ties a Christian to all loyalty and due obedience, which, being still *for the Lord's sake*, cannot hold in anything that is against the Lord's own command; for kings and rulers, in such a case, leave their station. Now the subjection here enjoined is, *hupotasso—Be subject* to them, as it were in your rank, still in subordination to God; but if they go out of that even line, follow them not. Those who obey the unlawful commands of kings do it in regard to their god, no question, but that their *god is their belly*,[166] or their ambition, or their greed.

But not only should the exercise of authority, and submission to it, be confined to things just and lawful in themselves, but the very purpose of the heart, both in command and obedience, should be in *the Lord*, and *for His sake*. This is the only straight, and the only safe rule, both for rulers and for people to walk by. Would kings, and the other powers of the world consider the supremacy and greatness of that King of whom they hold all their crowns and dignities, they would be no less careful of their submission and homage to Him, than they are desirous of their people's submission to themselves.

I will not speak at all of their civil obligations to their people, and the covenant of justice that with good reason is between them in the fundamental constitutions of all well-ordered kingdoms; nor meddle with that point—the dependence that human authority has upon the societies of men over whom it is, according to which it is here called *man's ordinance*, or *creature*, *anthropinos ktisis*. This is a thing that the greatest and most absolute of princes cannot deny, that all their authority is dependent upon the great God, both as the Author of it in the general, and the sovereign Disposer of it to particular men, giving the kingdoms of the earth to whom He will.[167] And therefore He may most justly require obedience and allegiance from them, that they *serve the Lord with fear*,[168] and if they rejoice in their dignities over men, yet that they do it with *trembling*, under a sense of their duty to God, and that they throw down their crowns at the feet of Christ, the Lord's Anointed.

And to this they are the more obliged, considering that religion and the Gospel of Christ very much presses the duty of their people's obedience to them; so that they wrong both Christianity and themselves very far, in mistaking it as an enemy to their authority, when it is so far from prejudicing it, that it confirms it, and pleads for it. Surely they most ungratefully requite the Lord and His Christ, when they say, *Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us*.[169] Whereas the Lord binds the cords of kings and their authority fast upon their people; not the cords of tyranny indeed, to bind the subjects as beasts to be sacrifices to the passion of their rulers, but the cords of just and due obedience to their kings and governors. The Lord does (as you see here) bind it upon all who profess His name, and strengthens it by the respect His people carry to Himself, enjoining them, that *for His sake*, they would obey their rulers. So that kings need not fear true religion, that it will ever favor anything that can justly be called rebellion; on the contrary, it still urges loyalty and obedience: so that as they should in duty, they may in true policy and wisdom, befriend true religion, as a special friend to their authority, and hate that religion of Rome which is indeed rebellion, and the mother of abominations who makes the kings of the earth drunk with her cup, and makes them dream of increase of authority while they are truly on the losing hand. But besides that they owe their power to the advancement of Christ's kingdom, by so employing themselves as to strengthen it they do themselves good; they confirm their own thrones, when they erect His: as it was said of Caesar, that by setting up Pompey's statue, he settled and fastened his own.

But it is an evil too natural to men, to forget the true end and use of any good the Lord confers on them. And thus kings and rulers too often fail to consider what they are exalted for; they think it is for themselves, to honor and please themselves, and not to honor God, and benefit their people, to encourage and reward the good (as here it is), and to punish the wicked. They are set on high for the good of those who are below them, that they may be refreshed with their light and influence; as the lights of heaven are set there in the highest parts of the world, for the use and benefit of the very lowest. *God set them in the firmament of heaven*, but for what purpose? *To give light upon the earth*.[170] And the mountains are raised above the rest of the earth, not to be places of prey and robbery, as sometimes they are turned to be, but to send forth streams from their springs into the valleys, and make them fertile: the mountains and hills (greater and lesser rulers, higher and lower,) are to send forth to the people the streams of righteousness and peace.[171]

But it is the corruption and misery of man's nature, that he does not know, and can hardly be persuaded to learn, either how to command rightly, or how to obey; and no doubt many of those who can see and blame the injustice of others in authority, would be more guilty that way themselves, if they had the same power.

It is the pride and self-love of our nature that begets disobedience in inferiors, and violence and injustice in superiors; that depraved humor which ties to every kind of government a procession to a particular disease; which makes royalty easily degenerate into tyranny, the government of nobles into faction, and popular government into confusion.

As civil authority, and the subjection to it are the institutions of God, so the peaceful relationship between these two—just government and due obedience—is the special gift of God's own hand, and a prime blessing to states and kingdoms; and the troubling and interruption of their course is one of the highest public judgments by which the Lord often punishes the other sins both of rulers and people. And whatever be the cause, and on whichever side be the justice of the cause, it cannot be looked upon but as a heavy plague, and the fruit of many and great provocations, when kings and their people, who should be a mutual blessing and honor to each other, are turned into scourges one to another, or into a devouring fire; as it is in the parable: *Let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem, and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and devour Abimelech*.[172]

1Pe 2:15-16

Ver. 15. For so is the will of God, that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men

Ver. 16. As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

This continues the same reason for the same Christian duty: if they will obey the Lord, then they must obey civil powers, for that is His will, and they will not deny their obligation to Him, for they are His servants (ver. 16). The words, indeed, are more general than the former, but they relate chiefly, in this place, to the particular in hand, implying that neither in that kind nor in any other, should Christians dishonor their profession, and abuse their liberty, mistaking it as an exemption from those duties to which it does more strictly tie them. So then, the point of civil obedience and all other good conversation amongst men, is here recommended to Christians, as conformable to the will of God, and the most effectual clearing of their profession, and very agreeable to their Christian liberty.

The will of God.] This is the strongest and most binding reason that can be used to a Christian mind, which has resigned itself to be governed by that rule, to have *the will of God* for its law. Whatever is required of it upon that warrant, it cannot refuse. Although it crosses a man's own temperament, or his private interest, yet if his heart is subjected to the will of God, he will not stand with Him in any thing. One word from God, "I will have it so," silences all, and carries it against all opposition.

It were a great point, if we could be persuaded to esteem duly of this: it were indeed all. It would make light and easy work in those things that go so hardly on with us, though we are daily exhorted to them. Is it the will of God that I should live soberly? Then, though my own corrupt will, and my companions be against it, yet it must be so. Does He will that I forbear cursing and oaths, though my custom is for them? Yet I must offer violence to my custom, and go against the stream of all the customs that surround me, to obey His will, who wills all things justly and holily. Will He have my charity not only liberal in giving, but in forgiving, and real and hearty in both? Will He have me bless those who curse me, and do good to those who hate me, and love my enemies?[1] Though the world considers it a hard task, and my own corrupt heart possibly finds it so, yet it shall be done; and not as upon unpleasant necessity, but willingly, and cheerfully, and with the more delight, because it is difficult; for so it proves my obedience all the more, and my love to Him whose will it is. Though my enemies don't deserve my love, yet He who bids me love them, does; and if He will have this the touchstone to try the uprightness of my love to Him, shall it fail there? No; His will commands me so absolutely, and He Himself is so lovely, that there can be nobody so unlovely in themselves, or to me, but I can love them upon His command, and for His sake.

But that it may be thus, there must be a renewed frame of mind, by which a man may renounce the world, and the forms of it, and himself and his own sinful heart, and its way, to study and follow the only *good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*,[2] to move most in that line, not willingly declining to either hand, to have his whole mind taken up in searching it, and his whole heart in embracing it. *Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is*,[3] says the Apostle Paul, being about to exhort to particular duties, as our Apostle here is doing.

This is the task of a Christian—to understand his Lord's will, and with a practical understanding, that he might walk in all well pleasing to God. Thus the Apostle likewise exhorts the Thessalonians passionately, and adds, *This is the will of God, even your sanctification*.[4] And he then proceeds particularly against uncleanness and deceit, &c.

Let this, then, be your endeavor, to have your wills crucified to whatever is sinful; not only so, but to will outward indifferent things with a kind of indifference. Most things that men are so stiff in aren't worth an earnest willing. In a word, the only happy and truly spiritual temper is to have our will quite rooted out, and the will of God placed in its stead; to have no other will than His, that it might constantly, yea, so to speak, identically follow it in all things. This is the will of God, therefore it is mine.

That with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.] The duties of the second table, or of well doing towards men, are more obvious to men devoid of religion, than those that have an immediate relation to God: and therefore (as in other Epistles) the Apostle is here particular in these, for the vindicating of religion to those who are without. Ignorance is usually loud and prattling, making a mighty noise, and so has need of a muzzle to silence it.[5] Those who were ready to speak evil of religion are called *witless* or foolish men; there was perverseness in their ignorance, as the word *aphron* intimates. And generally, all kinds of evil speakings and uncharitable censurings argue a foolish, worthless mind, whence they proceed; and yet, they are the usual amusement of the greatest part of mankind, and take up very much of their conversation and discourse; which is evidence of the baseness and perverseness of their minds. For, while those who have most real goodness, delight most to observe what is good and commendable in others, and to pass by their blemishes, it is the true character of vile unworthy persons (as scurvy flies sit upon sores), to skip over all the good that is in men, and fasten upon their infirmities.

But it especially reveals ignorance and folly, to turn the failings of men to the disadvantage of religion. None can be such enemies to it, but those who know it not, and see not the beauty that is in it. However, the way to silence them, we see, is by *well doing;* that silences them more than whole volumes of Apologies. When a Christian walks unreproveably, his enemies have nowhere to fasten their teeth on him, but are forced to gnaw their own malignant tongues. As it secures the godly, thus to stop the lying mouths of foolish men, so it is as painful to them to be thus stopped, as muzzling is to beasts, and it punishes their malice.

And this is a wise Christian's way, instead of impatiently fretting at the mistakes or wilful miscensures of men, to keep still on in his calm temper of mind, and upright course of life, and silent innocence: this, as a rock, breaks the waves into foam that roar about it.

As free.] This the Apostle adds, lest any should so far mistake the nature of their Christian liberty, as to dream of an exemption from obedience either to God, or to men for His sake, and according to His appointment. Their freedom he grants, but would have them rightly understand what it is. I cannot here insist at large on the spiritual freedom of Christians; nor is it here necessary, being mentioned only for the clearing of it in this point; but those are are, and those only, who are partakers of this liberty. *If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed*.[6] The rest are slaves to Satan and the world, and their own lusts: as the Israelites in Egypt, working in the clay under hard taskmasters.

Much discourse has been spent, and much ink has been spilt, upon the debate of *free-will;* but truly, all the liberty it has till the Son and His Spirit free it, is that miserable freedom the Apostle speaks of, *When you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness*.[7]

And as we are naturally subject to the vile drudgery of sin, so we are condemned to the proper *wages of sin*,[8] which the Apostle there tells us is *death*, according to the just sentence of the law. But our Lord Christ was anointed for this purpose, to set us free, both to work and to publish liberty, *to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound*.[9] Having paid our complete ransom, He sends His word as the message, and His Spirit, to perform it effectually, to set us free, to let us know it, and to bring us out of prison. He was bound and scourged, as a slave or malefactor, to purchase us this liberty; therefore it should be our special care, first, to have part in it, and then to be like it, and stand fast in it, in all points.

But so that we don't deceive ourselves, as too many do who have no portion in this liberty, we ought to know that it is not to inordinate walking and licentiousness, as our liberty, that we are called, but from them, as our thraldom; we are not called *from* obedience, but *to* it. Therefore take care that you don't introduce, under this specious name of *liberty*, anything that doesn't belong to it. Make it not *a cloak of maliciousness;* it is too precious a garment for so base a use. Liberty is indeed Christ's livery that He gives to all His followers; but to live suitably to it, is not to live in wickedness or disobedience of any kind, but in obedience and holiness. You are called to be *the servants of God*, and that is your dignity and your liberty.

The Apostles of this Gospel of liberty gloried in this title, the servants of Jesus Christ. David, before that Psalm of praise for his victories and exaltations, being now settled on his throne, prefixes, as more honor than all these, *A Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord*.[10] It is the only true happiness both of kings and their subjects, to be His subjects. It is the glory of the angels to be His *ministering spirits*.[11] The more we attain to the faculty of serving Him cheerfully and diligently, the more still we find of this spiritual liberty, and have the more joy in it. As it is the most honorable, it is likewise the most comfortable and most gainful service; and those who once know it will never change it for any other in the world. Oh that we could live as His servants, employing all our industry to do Him service in the condition and place in which He has set us, whatever it is, and as faithful servants, more careful of His affairs than of our own, considering it our main business to seek the advancement of His glory. *Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing*.[12]

1Pe 2:17

Ver. 17. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

This is a precious cluster of Divine precepts. The whole face of the heavens is adorned with stars, but they are of different magnitudes, and in some parts they are more thickly set than in others: thus is it likewise in the holy Scriptures. And these are the two books that the Psalmist sets open before us,[13] the heavens as a choice piece of the works of God instructing us, and the word of God more full and clear than they. Here is a constellation of very bright stars close together. These words have, very briefly, and yet not obscured by briefness, but besides very plainly, the sum of our duty towards God and men—to men both in general, *Honor all men;* and in special relations, in their Christian or religious relation, *Love the brotherhood*, and in a chief civil relation, *Honor the king*. And our whole duty to God, comprised under the name of *his fear*, is set in the middle between these, as the common spring of all duty to men, and of all due observance of it, and the sovereign rule by which it is to be regulated.

I shall speak of them as they lie in the text. We need not labor about the connection; for in such a variety of brief practical directions, it has not such a place as in doctrinal discourses. The Apostle having spoken of one particular in which he would have his brethren to clear and commend their Christian profession, now accumulates these directions as most necessary, and afterwards goes on to particular duties of servants, &c. But first, observe in general, how plain and easy, and how few are those things that are the rule of our life; no dark sentences to puzzle the understanding, nor large discourses and long periods to burden the memory; they are all plain; *there is nothing froward or perverse in them*, as Wisdom speaks of her instructions.[14]

And this gives check to a double folly amongst men, contrary the one to the other, but both agreeing in mistaking and wronging the word of God—the one is of those who despise the word, and the doctrine and preaching which is conformable to it, for its plainness and simplicity; the other of those who complain of its difficulty and darkness. As for the first, they certainly do not take the true end for which the word is designed, that it is the law of our life: (and it is mainly requisite in laws, that they be both brief and clear:) that it is our guide and light to happiness; and if that which ought to be our *light be darkness, how great is that darkness!*[15]

It is true, (but I am not now to insist on this point,) that there are dark and deep passages in Scripture, for the exercise, yea, for the humbling, yea, for the amazement and astonishment of the sharpest-sighted readers. But this argues much the pride and vanity of men's minds, when they busy themselves only in those, and throw aside altogether the most necessary, which are therefore the easiest and plainest truths in it. As in nature, the commodities that are of greatest necessity, God has made most common and easiest to be had, so in religion, such instructions as these now in our hands that are given us to live and walk by; and in the search of things that are more obscure, and less useful, men evidence that they had rather be learned than holy, and have still more mind to the *tree of knowledge* than the *tree of life*. And in the hearing of the word, are not those who are any whit more knowledgeable than ordinary, still gaping after new notions, after something to add to the stock of their speculative and discoursing knowledge, loathing this daily manna, these profitable exhortations, and requiring meat for their lust? There is an intemperance of the mind, as well as of the mouth. You would think it, and maybe not hesitate to call it a poor cold sermon, which was made up of such plain precepts as these—*Honor all men; love the brotherhood; far God; honor the king;*—and yet, this is the language of God; it is His way, this foolish, despicable way, by which He guides, and brings to Heaven those who believe.

Again; we have others who are still complaining about the difficulty and darkness of the word of God and divine truths; to say nothing of Rome's doctrine, who talks thus, in order to excuse her sacrilege of stealing away the word from the people of God: senseless pretext, though it were true; because the word is dark of itself, that therefore they should make it darker, by locking it up under an unknown tongue: but we speak of the common vulgar excuse, which the gross, ignorant profaneness of many seeks to shroud itself under, that they are not educated, and cannot reach the doctrine of the Scriptures. There are deep mysteries indeed; but what do you say to these things—such rules as these, *Honor all men*, &c.? Are these such riddles, that you cannot know their meaning? for do not all understand them, and all neglect them? Why don't you set out do these? and then you shall understand more. *A good understanding have all those who do his commandments*, says the Psalmist.[16] As one said well, "The best way to understand the mysterious and high discourse in the beginning of St. Paul's Epistles, is, to begin with the practice of those rules and precepts that are in the latter end of them." The way to attain to know more is to receive the truth in the love of it, and to obey what you know. The truth is, such truths as these will leave you inexcusable, even the most ignorant of you. You cannot but know, you hear often, that you ought to *love one another*, and *to fear God*, &c., and yet you never apply yourselves in earnest to the practice of these things, as will appear to your own consciences, if they deal honestly with you in the particulars.

Honor all men.] Honor, in a narrower sense, is not a universal due to all, but peculiar to some kinds of persons. Of this the Apostle speaks, Rom 13:7, *Honor to whom honor is due*, and that in different degrees, to parents, to masters, and other superiors. There is an honor that has, as it were, Caesar's image and superscription on it, and so is particularly due to him; as here it follows, *Honor the king*. But there is something that goes not improperly under the name of honor, generally due to every man without exception; and it consists, as all honor does, partly in inward esteem of them, partly in outward behavior towards them. And the former must be the ground and cause of the latter.

We do not owe the same measure of esteem to all. We may, yea, we ought to take notice of the different outward quality, or inward graces and gifts of men; nor is it a fault to perceive the shallowness and weakness of men with whom we converse, and to esteem more highly those upon whom God has conferred more of such things as are truly worthy of esteem. But to the lowest we do owe some measure of esteem: 1st. Negatively. We are not to entertain despising, disdainful thoughts of anyone, however worthless and contemptible. As the admiration of men, the very best, is a foolish excess on the one hand, so the total condemnation of any, the very poorest, is against this rule on the other; for the condemnation of vile persons, the Psalmist speaks of Psa 15:4, and commends, is the dislike and hatred of their sin, which is their vileness, and the not accounting them for outward respects, worthy of such esteem as their wickedness does, as it were, strip them of. 2ndly. We are to observe and respect the smallest good that is in any. Although a Christian be never so base in his outward condition, in body or mind, of very inferior intellectual and natural endowments, yet those who know the worth of spiritual things will esteem the grace of God that is in him, in the midst of all those disadvantages, as a pearl in a rough shell. Grace carries still its own worth, though under a deformed body and ragged garments, yea, though they have but a small measure of that neither—the very lowest degree of grace; as a pearl of the least size, or a small piece of gold, yet men will not throw it away, but, as they say, the least shavings of gold are worth keeping. The Jews would not willingly tread upon the smallest piece of paper in their way, but took it up; for possibly, said they, the Name of God may be on it. Though there was a little superstition in this, yet truly there is nothing but true religion in it, if we apply it to men. Trample not on any; there may be some work of grace there that you know not of. The Name of God may be written upon that soul you tread on; it may be a soul that Christ thought so much of, as to give His precious blood for it; therefore despise it not. Much more, I say, if you can perceive any appearance that it is such a one, you ought to esteem it. Wherever you find the least trait of Christ's image, if you love Him, you will honor it: or if there be nothing of this to be found in him whom you look upon, yet observe what common gift of any kind God has bestowed on him, judgment, or memory, or faculty in his calling, or any such thing, for these in their degree are to be esteemed, and the person for them. And as there is no man so complete as to have the advantage in everything, so there is no man so low and unworthy but he has something in which he is preferable even to those who in other respects are much more excellent. Or imagine you can find nothing else in some men, yet honor your own nature; esteem humanity in them, especially since humanity is exalted in Christ to be one with the Deity: account of the individual as a man. And, along with this esteem goes, 3rdly, that general good-will and affection due to men: whereas there are many who do not only outwardly express, but inwardly bear more regard to some dog or horse that they love, than to poor, distressed men, and in so doing, do reflect dishonor upon themselves, and upon mankind.

The outward behavior wherein we owe honor to all, is nothing but a conformity to this inward temper of mind; for he who inwardly despises none, but esteems the good that is in the lowest, or at least esteems them in that they are men, and loves them as such, will accordingly use no outward sign of disdain of any; he will not have a scornful eye, nor a reproachful tongue to move at any, not the meanest of his servants, nor the worst of his enemies; but, on the contrary, will acknowledge the good that is in every man, and give to all that outward respect that is suitable for them, and that they are capable of, and will be ready to do them good as he has opportunity and ability.

But instead of walking by this rule of *honoring all men*, what is there almost to be found amongst men, but a perverse proneness to dishonor one another, and every man ready to dishonor all men, that he may honor himself, reckoning that what he gives to others abates of himself, and taking what he detracts from others, as good booty to make up himself? Set aside men's own interest, and that common civility which for their own credit they use one with another, and truly there will be found very little of this real respect to others, proceeding from obedience to God, and love to men,—little tendering of their reputation and good name, and their welfare as of our own, (for so the rule is,) but mutual disesteem and defamation filling almost all societies.

And the bitter root of this iniquity is, that wicked, accursed self-love which dwells in us. Every man is naturally his own grand idol, would be esteemed and honored by any means, and to magnify that idol self, kills the good name and esteem of others in sacrifice to it. Hence the narrow-observing eye and broad-speaking tongue, upon anything that tends to the dishonor of others; and where other things fail, the disdainful upbraiding of their birth, or calling, or anything that comes next to hand that serves for a reproach. And hence arises a great part of the jars and strifes amongst men, the most part being drunk with an overweening opinion of themselves, and the unworthiest the most so—*The sluggard*, says Solomon, *is wiser in his own conceit than seven men who can render a reason:*[17] and not finding others of their mind, this frets and troubles them. They take the ready course to deceive themselves; for they look with both eyes on the failings and defects of others, and scarcely give their good qualities half an eye; while, on the contrary, in themselves, they study to the full their own advantages; and their weaknesses and defects (as one says) they skip over, as children do the hard words in their lesson, that are troublesome to read; and making this uneven parallel, what wonder if the result be a gross mistake of themselves? Men miscount themselves at home: they reckon that they ought to be regarded, and that their mind should carry it; and when they come abroad, and are crossed in this, this puts them out of all temper.

But the humble man, as he is more conformable to this Divine rule, so he has more peace by it; for he sets so low a rate upon himself in his own thoughts, that it is scarcely possible for any to go lower in judging of him; and therefore, as he pays due respect to others to the full, and gives no ground of quarrel that way, so he challenges no such debt to himself, and thus avoids the usual contests that arise in this. *Only by pride comes contention*, says Solomon.[18] A man that will walk abroad in a crowded street, cannot choose but be often jostled; but he who contracts himself, passes through more easily.

Study, therefore, this excellent grace of humility; not the personated acting of it in appearance, which may be a chief agent for pride, but true lowliness of mind, which will make you to be nothing in your own eyes, and content to be so in the eyes of others. Then will you obey this word; you will esteem all men as is proper, and not be troubled though all men disesteem you. As this humility is a precious grace, so it is the preserver of all other graces, and without it, (if they could be without it,) they were but as a box of precious powder carried in the wind without a cover, in danger of being scattered and blown away. If you would have honor, there is an ambition both allowed you, and worthy of you, whoever you are:[19] other honor, though it has its Hebrew name from *weight*, is all too light, and weighs only with cares and troubles.

Love the brotherhood.] There is a love, as we said, due to all, included under that word of *honoring all*, but a peculiar love to our Christian brethren, whom the Apostle Paul calls by a similar word, *the household of faith*.[20]

Christian brethren are united by a threefold cord; two of them are common to other men, but the third is the strongest, and theirs peculiarly. Their bodies are descended of the same man, and their souls of the same God; but their new life, by which they are most entirely brethren, is derived from the same God-man, Jesus Christ; yea, in Him they are all one body, receiving life from Him their glorious Head, who is called *the first-born among many brethren*.[21] And as His unspeakable love was the source of this new being and fraternity, so, doubtless, it cannot but produce indissoluble love amongst those who are partakers of it. The spirit of love and concord is that precious ointment that runs down from the head of our great High Priest to the skirts of His garment. The life of Christ and this law of love are combined, and cannot be severed. Can there be enmity between those hearts that meet in Him? Why do you pretend yourselves Christians, and yet remain not only strangers to this love, but most contrary to it, biters and devourers one of another, and will not be convinced of the great guiltiness and uncomeliness of strifes and envyings amongst you? Is this the badge that Christ has left His brethren, to wrangle and malign one another? Do you not know, on the contrary, that they are to be known by mutual love? *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another*.[22] How often does that beloved disciple press this! He drank deep of that wellspring of love that was in the breast on which he leaned, and (if they relate aright) he died exhorting this, Love one another. Oh! that there were more of this love of Christ in our hearts, arising from the sense of His love to us! That would teach this mutual love more effectually, which the preaching of it may set before us, but, without that other teaching, cannot work within us. Why do we still hear these things in vain? Do we believe what the love of Christ did for us, and suffered for us? And will we do nothing for Him,—not forgive a shadow, a fancy of injury, much less a real one, for His sake, and love him who wronged us, whoever he be, but especially being one of our brethren in this spiritual sense?

Many are the duties of this peculiar fraternal love; that mutual conversation, and admonition, and reproof, and comforting, and other duties that have fallen into neglect, not only amongst formal, but even amongst real Christians. Let us entreat more of His Spirit, who is love, and that will remedy this evil.

Fear God.] All the rules of equity and charity amongst men flow from a higher principle, and depend upon it; and there is no right observing of them without due regard to that: therefore this word, which expresses that principle of obedience, is fitly inserted amongst these rules; the first obligation of man being to the sovereign majesty of God who made him, and all the mutual duties of one to another being derived from that. A man may, indeed, from moral principles, be of a mild inoffensive carriage, and do civil right to all men: but this answers not the Divine rule even in these same things, after the way that it requires them. The spiritual and religious observance of these duties towards men, springs from a respect to God, and terminates there too; it begins and ends in Him. And generally, all obedience to His commands, both such as regulate our behavior towards Himself immediately, and such as relate to man, arises from a holy fear of His Name. Therefore, this fear of God, upon which follows necessarily the keeping of His commandments, is given us by Solomon as the total sum of man's business and duty,[23] and so the way to solid happiness: it is *totum hominis, the whole duty of man*.[24] After he had made his discoveries of all things besides under the sun, gone the whole circuit, and made an exact valuation, he found all besides this to amount to nothing but *vanity and vexation of spirit*.[25] The account he gives of all other things, was only for this purpose, to illustrate and establish this truth all the more, and to make it all the more acceptable; to be a rest after so much weariness, and such a tedious journey, and so, as he speaks there,[26] a word of delight as well as a word of truth; that the mind might sit down and quiet itself in this, from the turmoil and pursuit of vanity, that keep it busy to no purpose in all other things. But whereas there was emptiness and vanity, that is, just nothing, in all other things, there was not only something to be found, but everything in this one, this fear of God, and the keeping of His commandments,[27] which is the proper fruit of that fear. All the repeated declarations of vanity in other things, both severally and all together, in that book, are but so many strokes to drive and fasten this nail (as it is there, 12:11), this word of wisdom, which is the sum of all, and contains all the rest. So Job, after a large inquest for wisdom, searching for its vein, as men do for mines of silver and gold, has the return of a *non inventum est*—it is not found—from all the creatures: *The sea says, It is not with me,* &c. But in the close he finds it is in this, *The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding*.[28]

Under this fear is comprehended all religion, both inward and outward, all the worship and service of God, and all the observance of His commandments, which is there[29] and elsewhere expressly joined with it, and therefore is included in it, when it is not expressed. So Job 28:1-28 as above, *To depart from evil is understanding*, repeating in effect the former words by these. So Psa 111:10. It has in it all holiness and obedience; they grow all out of it. It is the beginning, and it is the top or consummation of wisdom, for the word signifies both.

Think it not, then, a trivial common matter to speak or hear of this subject; but take it as our great lesson and business here on earth. The best proficients in it have yet need to learn it better, and it requires our incessant diligence and study all our days.

This fear has in it chiefly these things: 1. A reverential esteem of the majesty of God, which is a main, fundamental thing in religion, and molds the heart most powerfully to the obedience of His will 2. A firm belief of the purity of God, and of His power and justice, that He loves holiness, and hates all sin, and can and will punish it. 3. A right apprehension of the bitterness of His wrath, and the sweetness of His love; that His incensed anger is the most terrible and intolerable thing in the world, absolutely the most fearful of all evils; and, on the other side, His love, of all good things the best, the most blessed and delightful, yea, the only blessedness. Life is the name of the sweetest good we know, and yet, *His loving-kindness is better than life*, says David.[30] 4. It supposes, likewise, sovereign love to God, for His own infinite excellence and goodness. 5. From all these springs a most earnest desire to please Him in all things, and an unwillingness to offend Him in the least, and, because of our danger through the multitude and strength of temptations, and our own weakness, a continual self-suspicion, a holy fear lest we should sin, a care and watchfulness that we sin not, and deep sorrow, and speedy returning and humbling before Him, when we have sinned.

There is, indeed, a base kind of fear, which, in the usual distinction, they call servile fear; but to account all fear of the judgments and wrath of God a servile fear, or (not to stand upon words) to consider such a fear improper to the children of God, I think is a wide mistake. Indeed, to fear the punishments of sin, without regard to God and His justice as the inflicter of them, or to forbear to sin only because of those punishments, so that if a man can be secured from those, he has no other respect for God that would make him fear to offend,—this is the character of a slavish and base mind. Again, for a man so to view wrath in relation to himself, as to be still under the horror of it in that notion, and not to understand redemption and deliverance by Jesus Christ, is to be under the spirit of bondage, which the Apostle speaks of, Rom 8:15. And though a child of God may for a time be under such fear, yet the lively actings of faith and persuasion of God's love, and the feeling of reflex love to Him in the soul, cast it out, according to that word of the Apostle, *Perfect* (or *true*) *love casts out fear*.[31] But to apprehend the punishments which the Lord threatens against sin, as certain and true, and to consider the greatness and fearfulness of them, especially the terror of the Lord's anger, and hot displeasure, above all punishments, and (though not only, no, nor chiefly for these, yet) in contemplation of these, as very great and weighty, to be afraid to offend that God who has threatened such things as the just reward of sin; this, I say, is not inconsistent with the state of the sons of God—not only so, it is their duty and their property even thus to fear.

1st, This is the very reason why which God has published these intimations of His justice, and has threatened to punish men if they transgress, so that they may fear and not transgress; so that not to look upon them in this manner, and not to be affected with them according to their design, is a very grievous sin; a slight and disregard put upon the words of the great God.

2ndly, Above all others, the children of God have the most right and clear knowledge of God, and the deepest belief in His word; therefore they cannot choose but be afraid, and more afraid than all others, to fall under the stroke of His hand. They know more of the greatness, and truth, and justice of God than others, and therefore they fear when He threatens. *My flesh trembles for fear of you*, (says David,) *and I am afraid of your judgments*.[32] Yea, they tremble when they hear the sentence against others, or see it executed upon them; it reminds them when they see public executions; *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*,[33] says St. Paul; and they cry out with Moses, *Who knows the power of your anger? Even according to your fear, so is your wrath*.[34] It is not an imagination or invention that makes men fear more than they need to. His wrath is as terrible as any who most fear it, can apprehend, and beyond that. Not only is this consistent with the state of the saints, it is their very character *to tremble at the word* of their Lord. The rest neglect what He says until death and judgment seize them; but the godly know and believe that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*.[35]

And though they have firm promises, and a *kingdom which cannot be moved*, yet they still have this grace *whereby they may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear;* even in this consideration, that our God, even He who is ours by peculiar covenant, *is a consuming fire*.[36]

But indeed, together with this—more than by this, they are persuaded to fear the Lord, by the sense of His great love for them, and by the power of that love working in them towards Him, and is wrought in them by His. They *shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days*.[37] In those days, His goodness shall manifest itself more than before; the beams of His love shall break forth more abundantly in the days of the Gospel, and shall beat more direct and hotter on the hearts of men; and then, they shall fear Him more, because they shall love Him more.

This fear agrees well both with faith and love—they effect this fear. Compare Psa 31:23, with Psa 34:9, and that same Psalm ver. 8, with ver. 9, and Psa 112:1-10 ver. 1, with ver. 7. The heart, touched with the load-stone of Divine love, still trembles with this godly fear, and yet looks fixedly by faith to that Star of Jacob, Jesus Christ, who guides it to the haven of happiness.

Looking upon God in the face of Jesus Christ removes the terror of His countenance that drives men from Him; and in the smiles of His love that appear through Christ, there is a power that unites their hearts to Him, but unites them in such a way as to fear His Name[38] as the Psalmist's prayer is. He puts a fear in their hearts that will not cause them to depart from—it causes them *not* to depart from Him.[39]

The purest and highest kind of godly fear springs from love—and though it doesn't exclude the consideration of wrath as terrible in itself, and even some fear of it, yet it may surmount it; and doubtless, where much of that love possesses the heart, it will sometimes drown the other consideration, so that it shall scarcely be perceptible at all, and will constantly set it aside, and will persuade a man purely for the goodness and loveliness of God, to fear to offend Him, though there were no interest at all in it of a man's own personal misery or happiness.

But do we fear the Lord our God in this manner? What then, do our oaths, and excesses, and uncleanness, our covetousness, and generally our unholy and unchristian conversation signify? This fear would make men tremble, so as to shake them out of their profane customs, and to shake their beloved sins out of their bosoms. The knowledge of the Holy One causes fear of Him.[40]

But, alas! we don't know Him, so we fear Him not. If we knew but a little of the great majesty of God, how holy He is, and how powerful a punisher of unholiness, we would not dare provoke Him, who can kill both body and soul, and cast them into hell,[41] as our Savior tells us. And He will do so with both, if we will not fear Him, because He can do so; we have been told so that we may *fear*, and not *feel*, this heavy wrath. A little lively, *spiritual* knowledge would go far, and work much, which a great deal of *our* knowledge, does not. A words such as Joseph's engraved on our hearts would do much—*Can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*[42] A man would take no more liberty to sin in secret than in public; he would not allow the sin of his thoughts any more than the most public words or actions. If some authoritative wise man saw our secret behavior and our thoughts, would we not examine them more closely, and not permit such rovings and follies in ourselves? Surely, therefore, we forget God's eye; if we thought of it rightly, we would not forget, but respect more than if all men saw within us.

Nor is this the main point to be pressed upon the ungodly only—the children of God themselves need to be reminded of this fear, and to increase in it. How often do they abuse the indulgence of such a loving Father? Their thoughts are not constantly full of Him; they are not *in the fear of the Lord* (as Solomon advises) *all the day long*,[43] but many times slip out of His directing hand, and wander from Him. They do not so deeply fear His displeasure as to watch over all their ways, as becomes them; they don't keep close to Him, and wait on His voice, and obey it constantly, and are not so humble and afflicted in their repentance for sin, as this fear requires, but only in a slight and superficial degree. They offer much lip-labor, which is but dead service to the living God. These are things, my beloved, that greatly concern us; we ought to seriously lay them to heart; for if those who are freed from condemnation walk fearlessly and carelessly at any time, He has ways enough to make them smart for it. And if for no other reason, should it not wound them deeply, to think how they repay such great, unspeakable love?

Honor the king.] This was the point that the Apostle pressed and insisted on before; and here he repeats it as a special duty of the second table, and a vindication of religion, which is wrongfully blamed in this point; but of this before.

This is without question in the general; the difference lies only in the measure and rule of it. And surely those who are so drunk with power as to admit of none at all, cannot possibly be satisfied,—no measure nor rate for it, no banks nor channel for those rivers, the hearts and wills of kings, to run in, but think that if they like to run over all they may.

There is a wild conceit that destroys all law of reason in human societies, and all religious obligations to the laws of God. For the qualification and measure, I shall mention no more than that in the text, that it is to be regulated by what here goes before it, *the fear of God;* that we never think of any such obedience and honor due to kings, as opposing the fear that is due to God. Let kings, and subjects, and all know that they are absolutely bound to this. It is spoken to kings, *Serve the Lord with fear;*[44] and to all men, Fear before Him, all the earth, *for the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised. He is to be feared above all gods*.[45] What is man compared to Him? Shall a worm, *whose breath is in his nostrils*,[46] stand in competition with the ever-living God? Shall an earthen potsherd strive with his Maker? *Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth;*—let them work one against another and see which is hardest, and so they shall often break each other;—but, *Woe unto him that strives with his Maker*.[47] There is nothing here but certain perishing. As we conclude in the question with the Church of Rome, of the honor due to Saints and Angels, let them have honor, with good reason, but not Divine honor, not God's peculiar honor; so, in this, *Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's,* but also, *and unto God the things that are God's*.[48]

But it is a miserable estate of a kingdom, when debates on this head arise and increase; and their happiness is, when kings and people concur to honor God: For those who honor Him, He will honor, and whoever despises Him shall be lightly esteemed.[49]

1Pe 2:18-20

Ver. 18. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

Ver. 19. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

Ver. 20. For what glory is it, if, when you are buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? but if, when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

Your word (says the Psalmist) *is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*,[50]—not only a light to please his eyes, by the excellent truths and comforts that are in it, but also a light to direct his feet in the precepts and rules of life that it gives—not only to inform and delight his mind, but also to order his course. That Philosopher was deservedly commended, who drew knowledge most this way, and therefore was said to have brought philosophy from the clouds to dwell amongst men, calling it from empty speculations to a practical strain. Thus we are taught in spiritual knowledge by the word of God. When the Son, the eternal Word, came to dwell with men, and so brought life, and wisdom, and all blessings from the heavens down to them, He taught them both by His doctrine and perfect example, how to walk; and His Apostles do, conformably, aim at this in their holy writings, joining with the mysteries of faith, the rules of life that show men the straight way to happiness.

And as it is spoken of the greatness of Solomon's wisdom, that *he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springs out of the wall*,[51] so in this, we may see the perfection of the holy Scriptures, which give the directions that are necessary to all ranks and sorts of men. They speak not only of the duties of kings, how they ought to behave themselves on their thrones, and the duty of their subjects towards them in that dignity, and how ministers and others ought to carry themselves in the *house of God;* but they come into private houses, and give economic rules for them; teaching parents, and children, and masters, yea, and servants, how to behave themselves one to another. Thus here, *Servants be subject to your masters*.

As this is a just plea for all the people of God—they have a right to use this book, which is so useful for all sorts, and they should not to be barred from it; it is also a plea against many who bar *themselves* the use of it, through slothfulness and earthly-mindedness, considering it is so adapted, that there are many things, yea, all the main things in it, profitable for all, suitable to the use of the lowest estate and lowest capacities of men. Yes, it takes (as we see) particular notice of their condition; stoops down to take the lowest servant by the hand, to lead him in the way to Heaven; and not only in that part of it which is the general way of Christians, but even in those steps of it that lie within the walk of their particular calling; as here, teaching not only the duties of a Christian, but of a Christian *servant*.

Obs. 1. The Scriptures are a deep that few can wade far into, and none can wade through, (as those waters Eze 47:5,) but yet, all may come to the brook and refresh themselves with drinking of the streams of its living water, and go in a little way, according to their strength and stature. Now this (I say) may be spoken to our shame, and I wish it might shame you to amendment, that so many of you either don't use the Scriptures at all, or, in using, do not use them; you turn over the leaves, and, it may be, run through the lines, but you don't consider what they advise you. Masters, learn your part; and servants too, listen to what they say to you, for they don't pass you by, they condescend to speak to you too, but you vouchsafe not to hear them, and observe their voice. How can you think that the reading of this book doesn't concern you, when you may hear it address such particular directions to you? Wisdom goes not only to the gates of palaces, but also to the common gates of the cities, and to the public highways, and calls to the simplest that she may make them wise. Besides dishonoring God, you prejudice yourselves; for doesn't that neglect of God and His word justly procure the disorder and disobedience of your servants towards you, as a fitting punishment from His righteous hand, although they are unrighteous, and are procuring further judgment to themselves in so doing? And not only thus is your neglect of the word a cause of your trouble by the justice of God, but it is so regarding the nature of the word, inasmuch as if you would respect it, and make use of it in your houses, it would teach your servants to respect and obey you, as here you see it speaks for you: and therefore you wrong both it and yourselves, when you silence it in your families.

Obs. 2. The Apostle having spoken of subjection to public authority, adds this of subjection to private domestic authority. The right ordering of families is a matter of great concern; for all other societies, civil and religious, are made up of these. Villages, and cities, and churches, and commonwealths, and kingdoms, are but a collection of families; and therefore such as these are, for the most part, such must the whole societies predominantly be. One particular house is but a very small part of a kingdom, yet the wickedness and lewdness of that house, even from the lowest in it, of servants one or more, though it seems but a small thing, yet it goes in to make up that heap of sin that provokes the wrath of God and draws on public calamity.

And this particularly, when it declines into disorder, proves a public evil; when servants grow generally corrupt, and disobedient, and unfaithful, though they are the lowest part, yet the whole body of a commonwealth cannot but feel very much the evil of it: as a man does when his legs and feet grow diseased and begin to fail him.

We have here, I. Their duty. II. The due extent of it. III. The right principle of it.

I. Their duty, *Be subject*. Keep your order and station under your masters, and that *with fear*, and inward reverence of mind and respect for them—that is the very life of all obedience. Then their obedience has in it diligent doing, and patient suffering: they are both in that word, *Be subject*. Do faithfully to your utmost that which is entrusted to you, and obey all their just commands, for action indeed goes no further; but suffer patiently even their utmost rigors and severities. And this being the harder part of the two, and yet, a part that the servants of those times bore, many of them being more hardly and slavishly used than any with us, (especially those that were Christian servants under unchristian masters,) therefore the Apostle insists most on this. And this is the extent of the obedience here required, that it be paid to all kinds of masters, *not only to the good, but also to the froward;* not only to obey, but to suffer, and suffer patiently, and not only deserved, but even wrongful and unjust punishment.

Now because this point concerns servants, let them reflect on their own behavior, and examine it by this rule; and truly the greatest part of them will be found very unconformed to it, being either closely fraudulent and deceitful, or grossly stubborn and disobedient, abusing the lenience and mildness of their masters, or murmuring at their just severity. They are so far from the patient endurance of the least undue word of reproof, much less of sharper punishment, either truly, or in their opinion undeserved. And truly, if any who profess religion dispense with this in themselves, they greatly err; for religion ties them more, whether children or servants, to be most submissive and obedient even to the worst kind of parents and masters, *always in the Lord;* not obeying any unjust command, though they may and ought to suffer patiently, as it is here, their unjust reproofs or punishments.

But, on the other side, this does not justify, nor at all excuse, the unmerciful austerities and unbridled passion of masters: it is still a perverseness and crookedness in them, as the word is here, *skolios*, and must have its own name, and shall have its proper reward from the Sovereign Master and Lord of all the world.

II. There is here, also, the due extent of this duty, namely, *To the froward*. It is a more deformed thing to have a distorted, crooked mind, or a froward spirit, than any crookedness of the body. How can he who has servants under him expect their obedience, when he cannot command his own passion, but is a slave to it? And unless much conscience of duty possess servants (more than is commonly to be found with them), it cannot but work a master into much disaffection and disesteem with them, when he is of a turbulent spirit, a troubler of his own house,[52] embittering his affairs and commands with rigidity and passion, and ready to take things by that side which may offend and trouble him, thinking his servant slights his call, when he may as well think he heard him not, and upon every slight occasion, real or imagined, flying out into reproachful speeches, or proud threats, contrary to the Apostle St. Paul's rule, which he sets over against the duty of servants: *Forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him*.[53] Think, therefore, when you shall appear before the judgment-seat of God, that your behavior shall be examined and judged as well as theirs; and think, that we think much of the differences between masters and servants, but they are nothing with God, they vanish.

Consider, *who makes you to differ another?*[54] Might He not, with a turn of His hand, have made your stations opposite, have made you the servant, and your servant the master? But we willingly forget the things that should compose our mind to humility and meekness, and blow them up with such fancies as please and feed our natural vanity, and make us somebody in our own account.

However, that Christian servant who falls into the hands of a froward master, will not be beaten out of his station and duty of obedience by all the hard and wrongful usage he meets with, but will take that as an opportunity to exercise all the more obedience and patience, and will be more cheerfully patient, because of his innocence, as the Apostle here exhorts.

Men do indeed look sometimes upon this as a just plea for impatience, that they suffer unjustly, which yet is very ill logic—for, as the Philosopher said, "Would any man that frets because he suffers unjustly, wish to deserve it, that he might be patient?" Now, to hear them, they seem to speak so, when they exclaim, that the thing that vexes them most is, that they have not deserved any such thing as is inflicted on them. Truly, desert of punishment may make a man more silent upon it, but innocence; rightly considered, makes him more patient. Guiltiness stops a man's mouth, indeed, in suffering, but surely it does not quiet his mind; on the contrary, it is that which mainly disturbs and grieves him; it is the sting of suffering, as sin is said to be of death.[55] And, therefore, when that is not, the pain of sufferings cannot but be much abated; yea, the Apostle here declares that to suffer undeservedly, and also patiently, is glorious to a man and acceptable to God. It is commendable, indeed, to be truly patient even in deserved sufferings, but the deserving them tarnishes the luster of that patience, and makes it look more like constraint: which is the Apostle's meaning, in preferring spotless suffering much before it. And this is indeed the true glory of it, that it pleases God; (so it is rendered in the close of the 20th verse, for the other word of *glory* in the beginning of it;) it is a pleasing thing in God's eyes, and therefore He will thank a man for it. Though we owe all our patience, under all kinds of affliction, as a duty to Him, and though that grace is His own gift, yet He has obliged Himself by His royal word not only to accept of it, but to praise it, and reward it in His children. Though they lose their thanks at the world's hands, and be rather scoffed at and taunted in all their doings and sufferings, it matters not; they can expect nothing else there; but their reward is on high, in the sure and faithful hand of their Lord.

How often do men work earnestly, and do and suffer much for the uncertain wages of glory and thanks amongst men! And how many of them fall short of their reckoning, either dying before they come to that state where they think to find it, or not finding it where they looked for it, and so live to feel the pain of their disappointment! Or, if they do attain their end, such glory and thanks as men have to give them, what amounts it to? Is it any other than a handful of nothing, the breath of their mouths, and themselves much like it, a vapor dying out in the air? The most real thanks they give, their solidest rewards, are but such as a man cannot take home with him; or if they go so far with him, yet, at farthest, he must leave them at the door, when he is to enter his everlasting home. All the riches, and palaces, and monuments of honor that he had, and that are erected to him after death, as if he had then some interest in them, reach him not at all. Enjoy them who will, he does not, he has *no portion forever in anything that is done under the sun;*[56] his own end is to him the end of the world.

But he who would have abiding glory and thanks, must look elsewhere for them. All men desire glory, but they know neither what it is, nor how it is to be sought. He is upon the only right bargain of this kind, *whose praise* (according to St. Paul's word) *is not of men, but of God*.[57] If men commend him not, he considers it no loss, or any gain if they do; for he is bound for a country where that coin goes not, and where he cannot carry it, and therefore he gathers it not. That which he seeks in all, is that he may be approved and accepted by God, whose thanks is no less, to the least of those He accepts, than a crown of unfading glory. Every poor servant who fears His name, and is obedient and patient for His sake, shall be so rewarded.

There are some kind of graces and good actions, which men (such as regard any grace) take special notice of, and commend highly,—such as those of a magnificent and remarkable nature, as martyrdom, or doing or suffering for religion in some public way. There are again other obscure graces, which, if men don't despise them, yet they don't esteem them very much; as meekness, gentleness, and patience under private crosses, known to few or none. And yet, these are of great account with God, and therefore should be so with us; these are of more universal use, whereas the other are but for high times, as we say, for rare occasions; these are everyone's work, but few are called to the acting of the other. And the least of these graces shall not lose its reward in any person, as St. Paul tells us, speaking of this same subject, *Knowing that whatever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free*.[58]

This is the bounty of the great Master that we serve. For what are we, and all that we can do, that there should be the name of reward attached to it? Yet He keeps all in reckoning; not a poor lame prayer, not a tear nor a sigh poured forth before Him shall be lost. Not any cross, whether from His own hand immediately, or coming through men's hands, that is taken, whatever way it comes, as out of His hand, and carried patiently, yea, and welcomed, and embraced for His sake, but He observes our so entertaining of it. Not an injury that the meanest servant bears Christianly, but goes upon account with Him. And He sets them down so, as that they bear much value through His estimate and way of reckoning of them, though in themselves they are all less than nothing; as a worthless counter stands for hundreds or thousands, according to the place you set it in. Happy are those who have to deal with such a Lord, and who, whether servants or masters, are vowed servants to Him. When He comes, His reward shall be with Him.[59]

III. The third thing is, the Principle of this obedience and patience: *For conscience towards God*. This imports, first, the knowledge of God, and of His will in some due measure, and then a conscientious respect unto Him and His will so known, taking it for their only rule in doing and suffering.

Observe, 1. This declares to us the freeness of the grace of God regarding men's outward quality, that He often bestows the riches of His grace upon persons of mean condition. It is supposed here that this *conscience towards God*, this saving knowledge and fear of His name, is to be found in servants; therefore, the Apostle takes them within the address of his letter amongst those who are *elect according to the foreknowledge of God*,[60] and sharers of the dignities he mentions, *a chosen generation*.[61] The honor of a spiritual royalty may consist with the lowness of a servant; and this grace may be conferred upon the servant, and denied to the master, as is here supposed. It may fall out that a perverse crooked-minded master may have a servant uprightly minded, being endowed with a tender respectful conscience towards God. And thus the Lord does, to counteract the pride of man, and to set off the luster of His own free grace. He has all to choose from, and yet chooses there, where men would least imagine. See Mat 11:25. 1Co 1:27.

Observe, 2. Grace finds a way to exert itself in every state where it is, and regulates the soul to the particular duties of that state. Whether it finds a man high or low, a master or a servant, it requires not a change of his station, but works a change on his heart, and teaches him how to live in it. The same spirit that makes a Christian master pious, and gentle, and prudent in commanding, makes a Christian servant faithful, and submissive, and diligent in obeying. A skilful engraver makes you a statue indifferently of wood, or stone, or marble, as they are put into his hand; so grace forms a man to a Christian way of walking in any state. There is a way for him in the lowest condition to glorify God, and to adorn the profession of religion; no state so low as to be shut out from that; and a rightly informed and rightly affected conscience towards God shows a man that way, and causes him to walk in it. As the astrologers say, that the same stars that made Cyrus to be chosen king amongst the armies of men when he came to be a man, made him to be chosen king amongst the shepherds' children, when he was a child; thus grace will have its proper operation in every state.

In this, men readily deceive themselves; they can do anything well in imagination, better than the real task that is in their hands. They presume that they could do God good service in some place of command, but serve Him not, as becomes them, in that which is by far the easier, the place of obeying, in which He has set them. They think that if they had the ability and opportunities that some men have, they would do much more for religion, and for God, than they do; and yet they do nothing, but spoil a far lower part than that, which is their own, and is given them to study and act rightly in. But our folly and self-ignorance abuse us—it is not our part to choose what we should be, but to be what we are, to His glory who gives us to be such. Be your condition never so mean, yet your *conscience towards God*, if it be within you, will find itself work in that. If it little is entrusted to you regarding your outward condition, or any other way, be faithful in that little, as our Savior speaks, and your reward shall not be little: *I will make you ruler over many things*.[62]

Observe, 3. As a corrupt mind debases the best and most excellent callings and actions, so the lowest are raised above themselves, and ennobled by a spiritual mind. Magistrates or ministers, though their calling and employments be high, may have low intentions, and draw down their high calling to those low intentions; they may seek themselves, and selfish ends, and neglect God. And a sincere Christian may elevate his low calling by this conscience towards God, observing His will, and intending His glory in it. An eagle may fly high, and yet have its eye down upon some carrion on the earth—and a man may be standing on the earth, and on some low part of it, and yet have his eye upon heaven, and be contemplating it. That which men cannot at all see in one another, is the very thing most considerable in their actions, namely, the principle from which they flow, and the end to which they tend. This is the form and life of actions,—that by which they are earthly or heavenly. Whatever be the matter of them, the spiritual mind has that alchemy indeed, of turning base metals into gold, earthly employments into heavenly. The handiwork of an artisan or servant who regards God, and eyes Him even in that work, is much holier than the prayer of a hypocrite; and a servant's enduring the private wrongs and harshness of a froward master, bearing it patiently *for conscience towards God*, is more acceptable to God, than the sufferings of those who endure much for a public good cause, without a good and upright heart.

This disposition and posture of the heart towards God, the Apostle St. Paul presses much upon servants,[63] as being necessary to allay the hard labor and harsh usage of many of them. This is the way to make all easy, to undergo it for God. There is no pill so bitter, but respect and love to God will sweeten it. And this is a very great refreshment and comfort to Christians in the low estate of servants or other laboring men, that they may offer up their hardship and bodily labor as a sacrifice to God, and say, Lord, this is the station in which You have set me in this world, and I desire to serve You in it. What I do is for You, and what I suffer I desire to bear patiently and cheerfully for Your sake, in submission and obedience to Your will.

For conscience.] In this there is, 1. A reverent compliance with God's administration, both in allotting to them that condition of life, and in particularly choosing their master for them: though possibly not the mildest and pleasantest, yet the most suitable for their good. There is much in firmly believing this, and in heartily submitting to it; for we would, naturally, rather carve for ourselves, and shape our own estate to our mind, which is a most foolish, and also impious presumption—as if we were wiser than He who has done it, and as if there were not as much, and, it may be, more possibility of true contentment in a low, than in a far higher condition! The master's mind is often more toiled than the servant's body. But if our condition has been appointed to us, we want to have at least a voice in some qualifications and circumstances of it—as in this, if a man must serve, he would wish willingly that God would allot him a meek, gentle master. And so, in other things, if we must be sick, we would be well accommodated, and not want helps; but to have sickness, and lack means and friends for our help, this we cannot think of without horror. But this submission to God is never right until all that concerns us is given up into His hand, to do with it, and with every article and circumstance of it, as seems good in His eyes. 2. In this *conscience*, there is a religious and observant respect to the rule which God has set men to walk by in that condition, so that their obedience does not depend on any external inducement, and so fails when *that* fails, but flows from an inward impression of the law of God upon the heart. Thus, a servant's obedience and patience will not be pinned to the goodness and equity of his master, but when that fails, will subsist upon its own inward ground; and so, generally, in all other conditions. This is the thing that makes sure and constant walking; makes a man step evenly in the ways of God. When a man's obedience springs from that unfailing, changing reason—the command of God—it is a natural motion, and therefore keeps on, and rather grows than abates; but those who are moved by outward things must often fail, because those things are not constant in their movement; as, for instance, when a people are much acted on by the spirit of their rulers, as the Jews when they had good kings. 3. In this *conscience*, there is a tender regard for the glory of God, and the adornment of religion, which the Apostle premised before these particular duties, as a thing to be specially regarded in them. The honor of our Lord's name, is that which we should set up as the mark to aim at in all our actions. But, alas! either we don't think about it, or our hearts slip, and start from their aim, *like a deceitful bow*, as the word is.[64] 4. There is the comfortable persuasion of God's approbation and acceptance, (as it is expressed in the following verse, of which somewhat before,) and the hope of the reward He has promised, as it is: *Knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for you serve the Lord Christ*.[65] No less than *the inheritance!* So then, such servants as these are sons and heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ.[66] Thus he who is a servant may be in a far more excellent state than his master. The servant may hope for, and aim at a kingdom, while the master is embracing a dunghill. And such a one will think highly of God's free grace; and the continual looking forward to that inheritance makes him go cheerfully through all pains and troubles here, as light and momentary, and not worth the naming compared to *that glory which shall be revealed*.[67] In the meantime, the best and most easy condition of the sons of God cannot satisfy them, nor restrain their sighs and groans, waiting and longing for that day of their full redemption.[68]

Now this is the great rule, not only for servants, but for all the servants of God in whatever state, to set the Lord always before them,[69] and to study with St. Paul, *to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men;*[70] to eye, and to apply constantly to their actions and their inward thoughts, the command of God; to walk by that rule abroad and at home in their houses, and in the several ways of their calling; as an exact workman is always laying his rule to his work, and squaring it; and *for the conscience they have towards God*, to do and suffer His will cheerfully in everything, being content that He has chosen their condition and their trials for them; only desirous to be assured, that He has chosen them for His own, and given them a right to the *glorious liberty of the children of God,*[71] still endeavoring to walk in the way that leads to it, overlooking this moment, and all things in it, considering their outward state here a very indifferent matter, provided they may be happy in eternity. Whether we are high or low here, bond or free, it matters little, seeing that all these differences will be so quickly at an end, and there shall not be so much as any track or footstep of them left. With particular men it is so in their graves; you may distinguish the greater from the less by their tombs, but by their dust you cannot: and so it shall be with the whole world in the end. All monuments and palaces, as well as cottages, shall be made fire, as our Apostle tells us: *The elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein, shall be burned up*.[72]

1Pe 2:21-23

Ver. 21. For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps:

Ver. 22. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

Ver. 23. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him who judges righteously.

The rules that God has set men to live by are universally just, and there is a universal obligation upon all men to obey them; but as they are particularly addressed to His own people in His word, they, out of question, are particularly bound to yield obedience, and have many peculiar inducements to it, that extend not to others, which are therefore usually represented to them, and pressed upon them in the holy Scriptures. Thus the preface of the Law runs to Israel: Besides that, *I am Jehovah*, and have supreme power to give men laws, it is added, *I am your God*, especially your deliverer from slavery and bondage, and so have a peculiar right to your obedience.[73] Thus the Apostle here urges this point in hand, of inoffensiveness and patience, particularly in Christian servants, but so as it fits every Christian in his station, *For hereunto*, says he, *were you called*. Whatever others do, though they think it too strict a rule, yet you are tied to it by your own calling and profession as you are Christians; and this is evidently the highest and clearest reason that can be, and of greatest power with a Christian, namely, the example of Jesus Christ Himself: *for Christ also suffered for us*, &c.

So it is all but one entire argument, *viz*. that they ought thusly to behave themselves, because it is the very thing they are called to, as their conformity to Jesus Christ, whose they profess to be, yea, with whom, as Christians, they profess themselves to be one.

Hereunto were you called.] This, in the general, is a thing that ought to be ever before our eyes, to consider the nature and end of our calling, and to endeavor in all things to act suitably to it; to think in every occurrence, What does the calling of a Christian require of me in this? But the truth is, most of us don't think this way. We profess ourselves to be Christians, and never think what kind of behavior this obliges us to, and what kind of persons it becomes us to be *in all holy conversation*, but walk disorderly, out of our rank, inordinately. You who are profane, were you called by the Gospel to serve the world and your lusts? Were you called to swearing and rioting and voluptuousness? Don't you hear the Apostle testifying the contrary, in express terms, that *God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness?*[74] You who are of proud contentious spirits, do you act suitably to this holy calling? No; for *God has called us to peace*, says the same Apostle.[75] But don't study this holy calling, and therefore we walk so inconsistently, so unlike the Gospel—*we lie and do not the truth*, as St. John speaks;[76] our actions belie us.

The particular things that Christians are here said to be called to, are, *suffering*, as their lot, and *patience*, as their duty, even under the most unjust and undeserved sufferings.

And both of these are as large as the sphere of this calling. Not only servants and others of a mean condition, who, lying low, are more subject to rigors and injuries, but, generally, all who are called to godliness, are likewise called to sufferings.[77] All who will follow Christ must do it in His livery; they must take up their cross. This is a very harsh and unpleasing article of the Gospel to a carnal mind, but the Scriptures don't conceal. Men are not led blindfolded into sufferings, and drawn into a hidden snare by the Gospel's invitations; they are told it very often, so they can't pretend to be surprised, or have any just plea for turning back. So our Savior tells His disciples, why He was so express and plain with them in this, *These things have I spoken unto you, that you should not be offended;*[78] as if He had said, I have shown you the ruggedness of your way, so that you won't stumble at it, taking it to be a smooth, plain one. But then, where this is spoken of, it is usually allayed with the mention of the comforts that accompany these sufferings, or of that glory which follows them. The doctrine of the Apostles, which was so verified in their own persons, was this, *That we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*.[79] An unpleasant way indeed, if you look no further; but a *kingdom* at the end of it, and that *the kingdom of God*, will transfuse pleasure into the most painful step in it all. So Psa 34:19-20. It seems a sad condition that falls to the share of godly men in this world, to be eminent in sorrows and troubles. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but that which follows weighs them abundantly down in consolation, that the Lord Himself is engaged in their afflictions, both for their deliverance out of them in due time, and in the meantime, for their support and preservation under them: *The Lord delivers him out of them all*, and until He does that, *He keeps all his bones*. This was literally verified in the natural body of Christ, as St. John observes,[80] and it holds spiritually true in His mystical body. The Lord supports the spirits of believers in their troubles, with such solid consolations as are the pillars and strength of their souls, as the bones are of the body, which the Hebrew word for them imports. So *He keeps all his bones;* and the desperate condition of wicked men is opposed to this, to illustrate it, *Evil shall slay the wicked*.[81]

Thus, Joh 16:33, they are forewarned in the close, what to expect at the world's hands, as they were various times before in that same sermon: but it is a sweet testament, take it altogether: *In the world you shall have tribulation, but peace in me.* And since He has jointly bequeathed these two to His followers, would it not be a great folly to renounce such a bargain, and to let go of that peace for fear of this trouble? The trouble is but *in the world*, but the *peace is in Him*, who weighs down thousands of worlds.

So then, those who would reconcile Christ and the world, who would have the Church of Christ, or at least, themselves for their own shares, enjoy both kinds of peace together, are very mistaken—they would willingly have peace in Christ, but are very loath to part with the world's peace. They would be Christians, but they are very poorly satisfied when they hear of anything but ease and prosperity in that state, and willingly forget the tenor of the Gospel in this; and so when times of trouble and sufferings come, their minds are as new and uncouth to it as if they had not been told of it beforehand. They like better St. Peter's carnal advice to Christ to avoid suffering,[82] than his Apostolic doctrine to Christians, teaching them, that as Christ suffered, so they too are called to suffering. Men are ready to think as he did, that Christ should favor Himself more in His own body, His Church, than to expose it to so much suffering; and most would be of Rome's mind in this, at least in affection, that the badge of the Church should be pomp and prosperity, and not the cross: the true cross of afflictions and sufferings is too heavy and painful.

But *God's thoughts are not as ours:* those whom He calls to a kingdom, He calls to sufferings as the way to it. He will have the heirs of Heaven know that they are not at home on earth, and that this is not their rest. He will not have them, with the abused world, fancy a happiness here, and, as St. Augustine says, *Beatam vitam quaerere in regione mortis*—seek a happy life in the region of death. The reproaches and wrongs that encounter them shall elevate their minds often to that land of peace and rest, *wherein dwells righteousness*.[83] The hard taskmasters shall make them weary of Egypt, which otherwise, possibly, they would comply too well with, and dispose them for deliverance, and make it welcome, which, it may be, they might but coldly desire, if they were better used.

He knows what He does, who secretly serves His own good ends by men's evil, and, by the ploughers that make long furrows on the back of His Church,[84] makes it a fruitful field to Himself. Therefore, it is great folly and rashness to take up a prejudice against His way, to think it might be better as we would model it, and to complain about the order of things, whereas we should complain of disordered minds: but we would rather have all altered and changed for us, the very course of Providence, than seek the cause of our own perverse hearts. But the right temper of a Christian is, to run always cross to the corrupt stream of the world and human iniquity, and to be willingly carried along with the stream of Divine Providence, and not at all to stir a hand, no, nor a thought, to row against that mighty current; and not only is he carried with it upon necessity, because there is no steering against it, but cheerfully and voluntarily; not because he *must*, but because he *would*.

And this is the other thing to which Christians are jointly called; as to suffering, so to calmness of mind and patience in suffering, although their suffering be most unjust; yes, this is truly a part of that duty they are called to, to maintain the integrity and inoffensiveness of life that might make their sufferings at men's hands always unjust. So the entire duty here is innocence and patience; doing willingly no wrong to others, and yet cheerfully suffering wrong when done to themselves. If either of the two are lacking, their suffering does not credit their profession, but dishonors it. If they are patient under deserved suffering, their guiltiness darkens their patience: and if their sufferings are undeserved, yea, and the cause of them honorable, yet impatience under them stains both their sufferings and their cause, and seems in part to justify the very injustice that is used against them; but where innocence and patience meet together in suffering, there sufferings are in their perfect luster. These are those who honor religion, and shame the enemies of it. It was the concurrence of these two that was the very triumph of the martyrs in times of persecution, who tormented their tormentors, and made them *more than conquerors*,[85] even in sufferings.

Now that we are called both to suffering and to this manner of suffering, the Apostle puts out of question, by the supreme example of our Lord Jesus Christ; for the sum of our calling is *to follow Him*. Now in both these, in suffering and in suffering innocently and patiently, the whole history of the Gospel testifies how complete a pattern He is. And the Apostle gives us here a summary, yet a very clear account of it.

The words have in them these two things, I. The perfection of this example. II. Our obligation to follow it.

I. The example he sets off to the full, 1. Regarding the greatness of our Savior's sufferings. 2. Regarding His spotlessness and patience in suffering.

The first we have in that word, *He suffered;* and afterwards, at ver. 24, we have His crucifixion and His stripes expressly specified.

Now this is reason enough, and carries it beyond all other reason, why Christians are called to a suffering life, seeing the Lord and Author of that calling suffered Himself so much. *The Captain*, or Leader, *of our salvation*, as the Apostle speaks, was made *perfect through sufferings* [86]—that was the way by which He entered into the holy place, where He is now our everlasting High-Priest, making intercession for us. If He is our Leader to salvation, must not we follow Him in the way He leads, whatever it is? If it be (as we see it is) by the way of sufferings, we must either follow on in that way, or fall short of salvation; for there is no other leader, nor any other way than that which He opened; so that there is not only a congruity in it, that His followers be conformed to Him in suffering, but a necessity, if they will follow Him on until they attain to glory. And the consideration of both these cannot but argue a Christian into a resolution for this *via regia*, this royal way of suffering that leads to glory, through which their King and Lord Himself went to His glory. It could hardly be believed at first that this was *His* way, and we can as hardly yet believe that it must be ours. *O fools, and slow of heart to believe! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?*[87]

Would you be at glory, and will you not follow your Leader in the only way to it? Must there be another way cut out for you by yourself? O absurd! Shall *the servant be greater than his Lord?*[88] Are not you fairly dealt with? If you have a mind to Christ, you shall have every bit as much of the world's good-will as He had—if it hates you, He bids you remember how it hated Him.[89]

But though there were a way to do otherwise, would you not, if the love of Christ possessed your hearts, rather choose to share with Him in His lot, and find delight in the very trouble of it? Is not this conformity to Jesus the great ambition of all His truehearted followers? *Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus*,[90] says the great Apostle. Besides the unspeakable advantage to come, which goes linked with this, that *if we suffer, we shall also reign with him*,[91] there is a glory, even in this present resemblance, that we are conformed to the image of the Son of God in sufferings. Why should we desire to leave Him? Are you not one with Him? Can you choose but to have the same common friends and enemies? Would you willingly, if it were possible—could you find in your heart to be friends with that world which hated your Lord and Master? Would you have nothing but kindness and ease, where He had nothing but enmity and trouble? Or would you not rather, when you think rightly of it, disdain and refuse to be so unlike Him? As that good duke said, when they would have crowned him king of Jerusalem: No, said he, by no means; I will not wear a crown of gold where Jesus was crowned with thorns.

2. Both His spotlessness and patience in suffering are set here before us; the one ver. 22, the other ver. 23.

Whoever you are who makes such a noise about the injustice of what you suffer, and think to justify your impatience by your innocence, let me ask you, Are you more just and innocent than He who is here set before you? Or, are you able to come near Him in this point? *Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth*. This is to signify perfect holiness, according to that word, *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man*.[92] Man is a little world, a world of wickedness; and that little part of him, *the tongue, a world of iniquity*.[93] But all Christ's words, as well as His actions, and all His thoughts, flowed from a pure spring, that had not anything defiled in it; and therefore no temptation, either from men or Satan, could seize on Him. Other men may seem clear as long as they are unstirred, but move and trouble them, and the mud arises; but He was nothing but holiness, a pure fountain, all purity to the bottom; and therefore stir and trouble Him as they would, He was still alike clear. *The prince of this world cometh, and has nothing in me*.[94]

This is the main ground of our confidence in Him, that He is a holy, harmless, undefiled High-Priest:[95] and such a one became us, says the Apostle, who are so sinful. The more sinful we are, the greater need that our High-Priest should be sinless; and being so, we may build upon His perfection, as standing in our place, yes, we are invested with Him and His righteousness.

Again, *there was no guile found in His mouth*. This serves to convince us concerning all the promises that He has made, that they are nothing but truth. Has He said, *Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out?*[96] Then you need not fear, however unworthy and vile you may be—do but come to Him, and you have His word that He will not shut the door against you. And as He has promised access, so He has further promised ease and soul's rest to those who come.[97] Then be confident to find that in Him too, for there was never a false or guileful word found in His mouth.

But to consider it only in the present action, this speaks Him the most innocent sufferer that ever was, not only judicially just in His cause, but entirely just in His person, altogether righteous; and yet, condemned to death, and an opprobrious death of malefactors, and set between two, as chief of the three! *I am*, says He, *the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys;*[98] and the Spouse says of Him, *My beloved is white and ruddy:*[99] thus, indeed, He was in His death, ruddy in His blood-shed, and white in His innocence, and also in His meekness and patience; the other thing in which He is here so exemplary.

Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again.] This spotless Lamb of God was a Lamb both in guiltlessness and silence; and the Prophet Isaiah expresses the resemblance, in that *He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter*.[100] He suffered not only an unjust sentence of death, but besides unjust revilings, *the contradiction of sinners*.[101] No one ever so little deserved revilings; no one ever could have said so much in His own just defence, and to the just reproach of His enemies; and yet, in both He preferred silence. None could ever threaten such heavy things as He could against His enemies, and have made good all He threatened, and yet no such thing was heard from Him. The heavens and the earth, as it were, spoke their resentment of His death who made them; but He was silent: or what He spoke makes this still good, how far He was from revilings and threatenings. As spices pounded, or precious ointment poured out, give their smell most, thus, His name was as *ointment* then *poured forth*,[102] together with His blood, and filling Heaven and earth with its sweet perfume, was a savor of rest and peace in both, appeasing the wrath of God, and so quieting the consciences of men. And even in this particular was it then most fragrant, in that all the torments of the cross, and revilings of the multitude, which, as it were, racked Him for some answer, yet could draw no other from Him than this, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*.[103]

But for those to whom this mercy belonged not, the Apostle tells us what He did; instead of revilings and threatenings, *He committed Himself to Him who judges righteously*. And this is the true method of Christian patience, that which quiets the mind, and keeps it from the boiling, tumultuous thoughts of revenge, to turn the whole matter into God's hand, to resign it over to Him, to prosecute when and as He thinks good. Not as most, who would rather, if they had power, do for themselves, and be their own avengers; and because they have no power, they offer up such bitter curses and prayers for revenge unto God, as are most hateful to Him, and are far from this calm and holy way of committing matters to His judgment. The common way of referring things to God is indeed impious and dishonorable to Him, being really nothing more than calling Him to be a servant and executioner to our passion. We ordinarily mistake His justice, and judge of it according to our own precipitant and distempered minds. If wicked men aren't thwarted in their designs, and their wickedness evidently crushed, just when we would have it, we are ready to give up the matter as desperate, or at least to abate of those confident and reverential thoughts of Divine justice that we owe Him. However things go, this ought to be fixed in our hearts, that He who sits in Heaven judges righteously, and executes His righteous judgment in the fittest season. We poor worms, whose whole life is but a handbreadth in itself, and is as nothing to God, think a few months or years a great matter; but to Him who inhabits eternity, *a thousand years* are but as *one day*, as our Apostle teaches eus.[104]

Our Savior, in the time of His humiliation and suffering, committed Himself and His cause (for that is best expressed, in that nothing is expressed but *He committed*) *to Him that judges righteously*, and the issue shall be, that all His enemies shall become His footstool[105] and He Himself shall judge them. But that which is given us here to learn from His behavior toward them in His suffering, is, that quietness and moderation of mind, even under unjust sufferings, make us like Him: not to reply to reproach with reproach, as our custom is, to give one ill word for another, or two for one, to be sure not to be behind. Men take a pride in this, and think it is ridiculous simplicity to suffer; and this makes strife and contention to abound. But it is a great mistake; you think it greatness of spirit to bear nothing, to put up with no wrong, whereas indeed it is great weakness and baseness. It is true greatness of spirit to despise most of the things that usually set you on fire one against another; especially being done after a Christian manner, it were a part of the Spirit of Christ in you: and is there any spirit greater than that, think you? Oh! that there were less of the spirit of the dragon, and more of the spirit of the dove amongst us!

II. Our obligation to follow the example of Christ, besides being enforced by its own excellence, is intimated in the two things contained in the words: 1. The design of His behavior for this use, to be as an example to us. 2. Our interest in Him, and those His sufferings, in which He so carried Himself.

1. That His behavior was intended as an example, *Leaving us an example*, &c. He left His footsteps as a copy (as the word in the original, *hupogrammos*, imports) to be followed by us; every step of His is a letter of this copy; and particularly in this point of suffering. He wrote us a pure and perfect copy of obedience in clear and great letters, in His own blood.

His whole life is our rule—not, indeed, His miraculous works, His footsteps walking on the sea, and such like, they are not for our following—but His obedience, holiness, meekness, and humility, are our copy, which we should continually study. The shorter and more effectual way, they say, of teaching, is by example; but above all, this matchless example is the happiest way of teaching. *He who follows me,* says our Lord, *shall not walk in darkness*.[106]

He, who aims high, shoots the higher for it, though he doesn't shoot as high as he aims. This is what ennobles the spirit of a Christian, the propounding of this our high pattern, the example of Jesus Christ.

The imitation of men in worthless things is low and servile; the imitation of their virtues is commendable; but if we aim no higher, it is both imperfect and unsafe. The Apostle St. Paul will have no imitation, but with regard to this Supreme Pattern: *Be you followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*[107]. One Christian may take the example of Christ in many things as exhibited in another, but still he must examine all by the original primitive copy, the footsteps of Christ Himself; following nothing, but as it is conformable to that, and looking chiefly on Him, both as the most perfect and most effectual example.[108] There is *a cloud of witnesses*,[109] and examples, but look above them all, to Him, who is as high above them as the sun is above the clouds. As in the covenant of grace the way is better, a living way indeed, so there is this advantage also, that we are not left to our own skill for following it, but taught by the Spirit. In the delivery of the law, God showed His glory and greatness by the manner of giving it, but the law was written only in dead tables. But Christ, the living Law, teaches by obeying it, how to obey it; and this, too, is the advantage of the Gospel, that the law is twice written over unto believers, first, in the example of Christ, and then inwardly in their hearts by His Spirit. There is, together with that copy of all grace in Him, a spirit derived from Him, enabling believers to follow Him in their measure. They may not only see Him *as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,* as it is Joh 1:14, but, as there it follows (ver. 16), they receive of *his fullness, and grace for grace*. The love of Christ makes the soul delight to converse with Him; and converse and love together, make it learn His behavior; as men who live much together, especially if they much affect one another, will insensibly contract one another's habits and customs.

The other thing obliging us is, 2ndly, Our interest in Him and His sufferings: *He suffered for us.* And to this the Apostle returns, ver. 24. Observe only from the tie of these two, that if we neglect His example set before us, we cannot enjoy any right assurance of His suffering for us; but if we seriously endeavor to follow Him, then we may be persuaded of life through His death, and those steps of His in which we walk will bring us before long to be where He is.

÷1Pe 2:24

Ver. 24. Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed.

That which is deepest in the heart is generally most in the mouth; that which abounds within runs over most by the tongue or pen. When men light upon the speaking of that subject which possesses their affection, they can hardly be taken off, or drawn from it again. Thus the Apostles in their writings, when they make mention any way of Christ suffering for us, love to dwell on it, as that which they take most delight to speak of; such delicacy and sweetness is in it to a spiritual taste, that they like to keep it in their mouth, and are never out of their theme, when they insist on Jesus Christ, though they have but named Him by occasion of some other doctrine; for He is the great subject of all they have to say.

Thus here, the Apostle had spoken of Christ in the foregoing words very fitly to his present subject, setting Him before Christian servants, and all suffering Christians, as their complete example, both in point of much suffering, and of perfect innocence and patience in suffering; and he had expressed their obligation to study and follow that example; yet, he cannot leave it so, but having said that all His sufferings in which He was so exemplary, were for us, as a chief consideration for which we should study to be like Him, he returns to that again, and enlarges upon it in words partly the same, partly very near those of that Evangelist among the Prophets.[110]

And it suits very well with his main scope, to press this point, as giving both very much strength and sweetness to the exhortation; for surely it is most reasonable that we willingly conform to Him in suffering, who had never been an example of suffering, nor subject at all to sufferings, nor in any degree capable of them, but for us; and it is most comfortable in the light sufferings of this moment, to consider that He has freed us from the sufferings of eternity, by suffering Himself in our place in the fullness of time.

That Jesus Christ is, in doing and in suffering, our supreme and matchless example, and that He came to be so, is a truth; but that He is nothing further, and came for no other purpose, is, you see, a high point of falsehood. For how should man be enabled to learn and follow that example of obedience, unless there was more than an example in Christ? and what would become of that great reckoning of disobedience that man stands guilty of? No, these are notions far too narrow. He came to bear *our sins in His own body on the tree*, and for this purpose, had a body fitted for Him and given Him to bear this burden, to do this as the will of His Father, to stand for us instead of all offerings and sacrifices; *by the which will*, says the Apostle, *we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all*.[111]

This was His business, not only to rectify sinful man by His example, but also to redeem him by His blood. He was *a Teacher come from God:*[112] as a Prophet, He teaches us the way of life, and as the best and greatest of Prophets, He is perfectly like His doctrine; and His actions (which in all teachers is the liveliest part of doctrine), His behavior in life and death, is our great pattern and instruction. But what is said of His forerunner, is more eminently true of Christ: He is *a Prophet, and much more than a Prophet*,[113]—a Priest satisfying justice for us, and a King conquering sin and death for us; an example indeed, but more than an example,—our sacrifice, and our life, our all in all. It is our duty to *walk, even as He walked*,[114] to make Him the pattern of our steps; but our comfort, and salvation lie in this, that *He is the propitiation for our sins*.[115] So, in the first chapter of that Epistle, We are to *walk in the light, as He is in the light;* but for all our walking, we need that which follows, that bears the great weight,—*The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin*.[116] And so still, that glory that He possesses in His own person, is the pledge of ours: He is there for us, *He ever lives to make intercession for us*, says the Apostle;[117] and *I go to prepare a place for you*, says our Lord Himself.[118]

We have in the words these two great points, and in the same order as the words lie: I. The Nature and Quality of the sufferings of Jesus Christ; and, II. The End of them.

I. In this expression of the Nature and Quality of the sufferings of Christ, we are to consider, 1. The Commutation of the persons, *he his own self*—for us. 2. The Work undertaken and performed, *He bore our sins in His own body on the tree*.

1. The act or sentence of the Law against the breach of it standing in force, and Divine justice expecting satisfaction, death was the necessary and inseparable consequence of sin. If you say, the supreme Majesty of God, being accountable to no one, might have forgiven all without satisfaction, we are not to contest that, nor foolishly to offer to sound the bottomless depth of His absolute prerogative. Christ implies in His prayer,[119] that it was impossible that He could escape that cup; but the impossibility is resolved into His Father's will, as the cause of it. But this we may clearly see, following the track of the Holy Scriptures (our only safe way), that this way in which our salvation is contrived, is most excellent and suitable to the greatness and goodness of God; so full of wonders of wisdom and love, that the Angels, as our Apostle tells us before, cannot forbear looking on it, and admiring it: for all their exact knowledge, yet they still find it infinitely beyond their knowledge, still in astonishment and admiration of what they see, and still in search, looking in to see more; those cherubim still having their eyes fixed on this Mercy-Seat.

Justice might have indeed seized on rebellious man, and laid the pronounced punishment on him. Mercy might have freely acquitted him, and pardoned all. But can we name any place where Mercy and Justice, as relating to condemned man, could have met and shined jointly in full aspect, save only in Jesus Christ?—in whom, indeed, *Mercy and Truth met together, and Righteousness and Peace kissed each other;*[120] yea, in whose Person the parties concerned, that were at such a great distance, met so near, as nearer cannot be imagined.

And not only was this the sole way of the consistency of these two, Justice and Mercy, but take each of them severally, and they could not have been manifested in so full luster in any other way. God's just hatred of sin did, beyond doubt, appear more in punishing His own only-begotten Son for it, than if the whole race of mankind had suffered for it eternally. Again, it raises the notion of mercy to the highest, that sin is not only forgiven us, but for this end God's own co-eternal Son is given to us, and for us. Consider what He is, and what we are—He, the *Son of His love*, and we, enemies. Therefore it is emphatically expressed in the words, *He Himself bore our sins. God so loved the world:*[121] that love amounts to this much, that it was so great, as *to give his Son:* but how great that Love is, cannot be uttered. *In this*, says the Apostle,[122] *God commends his love towards us*, sets it off to the highest, gives us the richest and strongest evidence of it.

The foundation of this plan, this appearing of Christ for us, and undergoing and answering all in our stead, lies in the decree of God, where it was plotted and contrived, in the whole way of it, from eternity; and the Father and the Son being one, and their thoughts and will one, They were perfectly agreed on it; and those likewise for whom it should hold, were agreed upon, and their names written down, according to which they are said to be given unto Christ to redeem. And just according to that model did all the work proceed, and was accomplished in all points, perfectly answering to the pattern of it in the mind of God. As it was preconcluded there, that the Son should undertake the business, this matchless piece of service for His Father, and that by His interposing, men should be reconciled and saved; so that He might be altogether a fit person for the work, it was resolved, that as He was already fit for it by the Almightiness of His Deity and Godhead, and the acceptableness of His person to the Father, as the Son of God, so He should be further fitted by wonderfully uniting weakness to Almightiness, the frailty of man to the power of God. Because suffering for man was a main point of the work, therefore, as His being the Son of God made Him acceptable to God, so His being the Son of man made Him suitable to man, in whose business He had engaged Himself, and suitable to the business itself to be performed. And not only was there in Him, by His human nature, a conformity to man, (for that might have been by a new created body,) but a consanguinity with man, by a body framed of the same piece,—a Redeemer, a kinsman (as the Hebrew word *goel* is),—only purified for His use, as was necessary, and framed after a peculiar manner, in the womb of a virgin, as it is expressed, Heb 10:5, *A body have you prepared me*,—having no sin itself, because ordained to have so much of our sins: as it is here, *He bore our sins in his own body*.

And this looks back to the primitive transaction and purpose. *Lo! I come—to do your will*,[123] says the Son. *Behold my servant whom I have chosen*,[124] says the Father, this masterpiece of my works; no one in Heaven or earth is fit to serve me in this, but my own Son. And as He came into the world according to that decree and will, so He goes out of it again in that way. *The Son of man goes, as it was determined:*[125] it was wickedly and maliciously done by men against Him, but it was *determined* (which is what He there speaks of) wisely and graciously by His Father, with His own consent. As in those two-faced pictures, look upon the crucifying of Christ one way, as conspired by a treacherous disciple and malicious priests and rulers, and nothing more deformed and hateful than the authors of it—but view it again, as determined in God's counsel, for the restoring of lost mankind, and it is full of unspeakable beauty and sweetness, infinite wisdom and love in every trait of it.

Thus also, as to the persons for whom Christ engaged to suffer, their coming to Him looks back to the first donation of the Father, as flowing from that—*All that the Father gives me shall come to me*.[126]

Now this being God's great design, which He would have men eye and consider more than all the rest of His works (and yet it is least of all considered by the most), the other Covenant made with the first Adam, was but to make way, and, if we may so speak, to make work for this. For He knew that it would not hold; therefore, as this New Covenant became necessary by the breach of the other, so the failing of that other sets off and commends the firmness of this. The former was made with a man in his best condition, and yet he kept it not: even then, he proved vanity, as it is Psa 39:5, *Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity*. So that the second, that it might be stronger, is made with a Man indeed, to supply the place of the former, but He is *God-Man*, to be surer than the former, and therefore it holds. And this is the difference, as the Apostle expresses it, that the first Adam, in that Covenant, was laid as a foundation, and though we say not that the Church, in its true notion, was built on him, yet, the estate of the whole race of mankind, the materials which the Church is built of, lay on him for that time; and it failed. But upon this Rock, the second Adam, is the Church so firmly built, that the gates of hell cannot prevail against her.[127] *The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening* (or life-giving) *spirit*.[128] The first had life, but he transferred it not, yea, he kept it not for himself, but drew in and transferred death; but the Second, by death, conveys life to all that are reckoned His seed: *He bore their sins*.

2. As to the work itself. He bore them *on the tree*. In that outside of His suffering, the visible kind of death inflicted on Him, in that it was hanging on the tree of the cross, there was an analogy with the end and main work; and it was ordered by the Lord with regard to that end, being a death declared accursed by the Law, as the Apostle St. Paul observes,[129] and so declaring Him who was God blessed forever, to have been *made a curse* (that is, accounted as accursed) for us, that we might be blessed in Him, in whom, according to the promise, all the nations of the earth are blessed.[130]

The strength and main stress of His sufferings, was in this invisible weight which none could see who gazed on Him, but which He felt more than all the rest: *He bore our sins*. In this there are three things. 1. The weight of sin. 2. The transferring of it upon Christ. 3. His bearing of it.

[1.] He bore sin as a heavy burden; so the word bearing signifies in general, and those two words particularly used by the Prophet,[131] to which these allude, imply the bearing of some great mass or load. And such is sin; for it has the wrath of an offended God hanging at it, indissolubly tied to it, of which who can bear the least? And therefore, the least sin, being the procuring cause of it, will press a man down forever, so that he shall not be able to rise. *Who may stand in your sight when once you are angry?*[132] says the Psalmist. And the Prophet Jeremiah,[133] *Return, you backsliding Israel, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you—to fall* as a great weight; or as a millstone, and crush the soul.

But senseless, we go lightly under the burden of sin, and feel it not, complain not of it, and are therefore truly said to be dead in it; otherwise it could not but press us, and press out complaints. *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?*[134] A profane, secure sinner thinks nothing of breaking the holy law of God, to please his flesh, or the world; he counts sin a light matter, *makes a mock at sin*,[135] as Solomon says. But a stirring conscience is of another mind: *My iniquities are gone over my head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me*.[136]

Sin is such a burden as makes the very frame of Heaven and earth, which is not guilty of it, yea, the whole creation, to crack and groan, (it is the Apostle's doctrine,[137]) and yet, the impenitent heart, whose guiltiness it is, continues unmoved, groans not; for your customary groaning has nothing to do with this.

Yes, to consider it in connection with the present subject, where we may best read what it is, it was a heavy load to Jesus Christ. In Psa 40:12, the Psalmist, speaking in the person of Christ, complains heavily, *Innumerable evils have compassed me about: my iniquities* (not His, as done by Him, but yet His, by His undertaking to pay for them,) *have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head: therefore my heart fails me.* And surely, no one in Heaven or on earth could have sustained and surmounted that which pressed *Him* so sore who upholds Heaven and earth—but would have sunk and perished under it. Was it, do you think, the pain of that common outside of His death, though very painful, that drew such a word from Him, *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*[138] Or was it the fear of that beforehand, that pressed a sweat of blood from Him? No, it was this burden of sin, the first of which was committed in the garden of Eden, that then began to be laid upon Him and fastened upon His shoulders in the garden of Gethsemane, ten thousand times heavier than the cross which He was caused to bear. That might be for a while turned over to another, but this could not. This was the cup He trembled at more than at the gall and vinegar to be afterwards offered to Him by His crucifiers, or any other part of His external sufferings: it was the bitter cup of wrath due to sin, which His Father put into His hand, and caused Him to drink, the very same thing that is here called the *bearing of our sins in his body*.

And consider, that the very smallest sins went in to make up this load, and made it so much the heavier; and therefore, though sins may be comparatively smaller and greater, yet learn here to consider no sin in itself small, which offends the great God, and which lay heavy upon your great Redeemer in the day of His sufferings.

At His apprehension, besides the soldiers, that invisible crowd of the sins He was to suffer for, came about Him, for it was these that laid strongest hold on Him: He could easily have shaken off all the rest, as appears;[139] but our sins laid the arrest on Him, being accounted His, as it is in that fore-cited place,[140] *My iniquities*. Now amongst these were even those sins we call small; they were of the number that took Him, and they were amongst those instruments of His bloodshed. If the greater were as the spear that pierced His side, the less were as the nails that pierced His hands and His feet, and the very least as the thorns that were set on His precious head. And the multitude of them made up what was lacking in their magnitude—though they were small they were many.

[2.] They were transferred upon Him by virtue of the covenant that we spoke of. They became His debt, and He became responsible for all they came to. Since you have accepted this business according to my will (may we conceive the Father saying to His Son), you must go through with it: you are engaged in it, but it is nothing other than what you understood perfectly before; you knew what it would cost you, and yet out of joint love with Me to those I named to be saved by you, you were as willing as I to the whole undertaking. Now therefore the time is come that I must lay upon you the sins of all those persons, and you must bear them; the sins of all those believers who lived before, and all who are to come after, to the end of the world. *The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*,[141] says the Prophet; took it off from us and charged it on Him, made it *to meet on Him*, or *to fall in together*, as the word in the original imports. The sins of all, in all ages before and after, who were to be saved, all their guiltiness re-encountered and met together on His back upon the Cross. Whoever of all that number had least sin, yet had no small burden to cast on Him; and to give accession to the whole weight, *we have turned every one to his own way*,[142] as the Prophet there expresses it, and He paid for all; all fell on Him. And as in testimony of His meekness and patience, so, in this respect likewise, was He so silent in His sufferings, that though His enemies dealt most unjustly with Him, yet He stood as convicted before the justice-seat of His Father, under the imputed guilt of all our sins, and so eyeing Him, and counting His business to be chiefly with Him, He patiently bore the due punishment of all our sins at His Father's hand, according to that of the Psalmist, *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because you did it*.[143] Therefore the Prophet immediately subjoins the description of His silent demeanor, to that which he had spoken of, the confluence of our iniquities upon Him: *As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth*.[144]

And if our sins were thus accounted His, then, in the same way, and for that very reason, His sufferings and satisfaction must of necessity be accounted ours. As He said on behalf of His disciples to the men who came to take Him, *If therefore you seek me, let these go their way:*[145] so He said for all believers to His Father, His wrath then seizing on Him, If you will lay hold of Me, then let these go free. And thus the agreement was: *He has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*.[146]

So then, there is a union between believers and Jesus Christ, by which this interchange is made; He being charged with their sins, and they clothed with His satisfaction and righteousness. This union is founded, 1st, in God's decree of Election, running to this effect, that they should live in Christ, and so choosing the Head and the whole mystical Body as one, and counting their debt as His, in His purpose, that He might receive satisfaction, and they salvation, in their Head, Christ. The execution of that purpose and union began in Christ's Incarnation: it being for them, though the nature He assumed was more common. He is said *not to take hold on the angels; but on the seed of Abraham*,[147] the company of believers—He became man for their sakes, because they are men. That He is of the same nature with unbelieving men who perish, is but by accident, as it were: there is no good to them in that, but the great evil of deeper condemnation, if they hear of Him, and believe not; but He was made man to be like, yea, to be one with the Elect, and *He is not ashamed to call them brethren*,[148] as the Apostle there says. *2ndly*, This union is also founded in the actual intention of the Son so made man; He presenting Himself to the Father in all He did and suffered, as for them, having them, and them only, in His eye and thoughts, in all. *For their sakes I sanctify myself*.[149] Again, *3rdly*, This union is applied and performed in them, when they are converted and engrafted into Jesus Christ by faith; and this actually discharges them of their own sins, and entitles them to His righteousness, and so justifies them in the sight of God. *4thly*, The consummation of this union is in glory, which is the result and fruit of all the former. As it began in Heaven, it is completed there; but between these two in Heaven, the intervention of those other two degrees of it on earth was necessary, being intended in the first, as tending to the attainment of the last. These four steps of it are all distinctly expressed in our Lord's own prayer.[150] *1st*, God's purpose that the Son *should give eternal life to as many as you have given Him,* ver. 2. *2ndly*, The Son's undertaking and accomplishing their redemption in ver. 4: *I have finished the work which you gave me to do. 3rdly*, The application of this union, and its performance in them, by their faith, their believing, and keeping His word, ver. 6, 8, and in several of the subsequent verses. And then, lastly, the consummation of this union, ver. 24: *I will that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am.* There, the first donation and the last meet.

Now to obtain this life for them, Christ died *in their stead*. He appeared as the High-Priest, being perfectly and truly what the name was on their plate of gold, *Holiness to the Lord*, and so bearing their iniquity, as it is there added of Aaron.[151] But because the High-Priest was not the Redeemer, but only prefigured Him, he did not himself suffer for the people's sin, but turned it over upon the beasts which he sacrificed, signifying that translation of sin, by laying his hand upon the head of the beast. But Jesus Christ is both the great High-Priest and the great Sacrifice in one: and this seems to be here implied in these words, *Himself bore our sins in His own body*, which the priest under the Law did not. So, Isa 53:10, and Heb 9:12, He made *his soul an offering for sin*. He offered up Himself, His whole self. In the history of the Gospel it is said that *His soul was heavy*,[152] and chiefly suffered; but it is the bearing sin in *His body*, and offering it, that is most often mentioned as the visible part of the sacrifice, and in His way of offering it not excluding the other. Thus, we are exhorted to give *our bodies*, in opposition to the bodies of beasts, and they are therefore called *a living sacrifice*,[153] which they are not without the soul. So, Christ's bearing our sin in *His body* imports the bearing of it in His soul too.

[3.] His *bearing* of our sins, hints that He was active and willing in His suffering for us; it was not a constrained offering. *I lay down my life*,[154] as He Himself tells us; and this expression here, *He bore*, implies, He took willingly off, lifted from us that burden, to bear it Himself. It was counted an ill sign amongst the heathens, when the beasts went unwillingly to be sacrificed, and drew back, and a good omen when they went willingly. But never was a sacrifice so willing as our Great Sacrifice; and we may be assured He has appeased His Father's wrath, and wrought atonement for us. Isaac was in this a type of Christ; we hear of no reluctance; he submitted quietly to be bound when he was to be offered up. There are two words used in Isa 53:4, the one signifying *bearing*, the other *taking away*. This *bearing* includes, also, that taking away of the sins of the world, spoken of by St. John, which answers to both: and so He, the Great Antitype, answers to both the goats, the sin offering and the scape-goat.[155] He bore our sins on His cross, and from there bore them away to His grave, and there they are buried; and those whose sins He did so bear, and take away, and bury, shall hear no more of them as theirs to bear. Is He not, then, worthy to be beheld in that notion under which John, in the aforementioned text, viewed Him and designated Him?—*Behold the Lamb of God, who bears and takes away the sin of the world*.[156]

You then, who are gazing on vanity, be persuaded to turn your eyes this way, and behold this lasting wonder, this Lord of Life dying! But the most, alas! lack a due eye for this object. It is the eye of faith alone that looks rightly on Him, and is daily discovering new worlds of excellence and delight in this crucified Savior; that can view Him daily, as hanging on the cross, without the childish, gaudy help of a crucifix, and grow in the knowledge of that love which passes knowledge, and rejoice itself in frequent thinking and speaking of Him, instead of those idle and vain thoughts at the best, and empty discourses, in which most delight, and wear out their day. What is all knowledge but painted folly compared to this? If you had Solomon's faculty to discourse of all plants, and had not the right knowledge of this *root of Jesse;* were you singular in the knowledge of the stars and of the course of the heavens, and could walk through the spheres with a *Jacob's staff*, but ignorant of this *star of Jacob;* if you knew the histories of all time, and the life and death of all the most famous princes, and could rehearse them all, but do not spiritually know and apply to yourself the death of Jesus as your life—you are still a wretched fool, and all your knowledge shall perish with you. On the other side, if your capacity or breeding has denied you the knowledge of all these things in which men glory so much, yet, you but learn *Christ crucified*— what would you have more? That shall make you happy forever. *For this is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*.[157]

Here St. Paul takes up his rest, *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*.[158] As if he had said, Whatever else I knew, I resolved to be as if I knew nothing besides this, the only knowledge that I will rejoice in myself, and which I will labor to impart to others. I have tried and compared the rest—I find them all unworthy of their place beside this, and my whole soul too little for this. I have passed this judgment and sentence on all. I have adjudged myself to deny all other knowledge, and confine myself within this circle, and I am not constricted. No, there is room enough in it; it is larger than Heaven and earth, *Christ, and Him crucified;* the most despised and ignominious part of knowledge, yet the sweetest and most comfortable part of all—the root that all our hopes of life and spiritual joys spring from.

But the greatest part of mankind hears this subject as a story. Some are a little moved with the present sound of it, but they don't draw it home into their hearts, to make it theirs, and to find salvation in it, but still cleave to sin, and love sin better than Him who suffered for it.

But you whose hearts the Lord has deeply humbled under a sense of sin, come to this depth of consolation, and try it, that you experience the sweetness and riches of it. Study this point thoroughly, and you will find it answer all, and quiet your consciences. Apply this bearing of sin by the Lord Jesus for you, for it is published and made known to you for this purpose. This is the genuine and true use of it, as of the *brazen serpent*, not that the people might emptily gaze on the fabric of it, but to cure those that looked on it.[159] When all that can be said, is said against you, "It is true," you may say, "but it is all satisfied for; He on whom I rest made it His, and bore it for me." The person of Christ is of more worth than all men, yes, than all the creatures, and, therefore, His life was a full ransom for the greatest offender.

And as for outward troubles and sufferings, which were the occasion of this doctrine in this place, they are all made exceedingly light by the removal of this great pressure. Let the Lord lay on me what He will, since He has taken off my sin, and laid that on His own Son in my stead. I may suffer many things, but He has borne that for me, which alone was able to make me miserable.

And you who have this persuasion, how will your hearts be taken up with His love, who has so loved you as to give Himself for you;[160] who interposed Himself to bear off from you the stroke of everlasting death, and encountered all the wrath due to us, and went through with that great work, because of His unspeakable love? Let Him never go forth from my heart, who, for my sake, refused to come down from the cross.

II. The end of these sufferings. [*That we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.*] The Lord does nothing in vain; He has not made the least of His works to no purpose; *in wisdom you have made them all*,[161] says the Psalmist. And this is true, not only regarding their excellent frame and order, but of their end, which is a chief point of wisdom. So then, in order to have the right knowledge of this great work put into the hands of Jesus Christ, it is of special concern to understand what its purpose is.

Now this is the thing which Divine wisdom and love aimed at in that great undertaking, and therefore it will be our truest wisdom, and the truest evidence of our reflected love, to intend the same thing, that in this, the same mind may be in us, that was in Christ Jesus,[162] in His suffering for us; for this very end it is expressed, *That we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness*.

In this there are three things to be considered: 1st, What this life and death is; 2ndly, The designing of it in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ; 3rdly, The effecting of it by them.

1st. What this death and life is. Whatever it is, surely it is no small change that bears the name of the great and last natural change that we are subject to—death—and then another kind of life after it.

In this most are mistaken, in that they take any slight alteration in themselves for true conversion. A world of people are deluded with superficial moral changes in their life, some amendment of their outward actions and course of life, and somewhat too in the temper and habit of their mind. Far from reaching the bottom of nature's wickedness, and laying the axe to the root of the tree, it is such a work as men can make a shift with by themselves. But the renovation that the Spirit of God works is like Himself: it is so deep and thorough a work, that it is justly called by the name of the most substantial works and productions: a new birth, and more than that, a new creation, and here, a death and a kind of life following it.

This death to sin supposes a former living in it, and to it; and while a man does so, he is said indeed to be dead in sin, and yet it is also true that he lives in sin, as the Apostle, speaking of widows, joins the expression, *She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives*.[163] So Eph 2:1, *Dead in trespasses and sins*, and he adds, *wherein in time past you walked*, ver. 2, which signifies a life, such a one as it is; and more expressly, ver. 3, *We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh*. Now, to live thusly in sin is called being dead in it, because, in that condition, man is indeed dead regarding that Divine life of the soul, that happy being which it should have in union with God, for which it was made, and without which it had better not be at all. For that life, as it is different from its natural being, and a kind of life above it, is contrary to the corrupt being and life it had in sin. Therefore, to live in sin is to be dead in it, being deprived of the Divine being, the life of the soul in God, in comparison of which, not only the base life it has in sin, but the very natural life it has in the body, and which the body has by it, is not worthy of the name of life. When the body's thread of union with the soul is cut, it immediately becomes motionless lump, and within a little time, a putrefied, noxious carcass; thus the soul, cut off by sin from God who is its life, as the soul is the life of the body has no moving faculty in good, and becomes full of rottenness and vileness—as the word is, *They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy*.[164] The soul, by turning away from God, turns filthy; yet, as a spiritually dead man lives naturally, he acts and spends that natural life in the ways of sin, so he is said to live in sin. Yea, there is something more in that expression than the mere passing of his life in that way; for instead of the happy life that his soul should have in God, he pleases himself in the miserable life of sin, that which is his death, as if it were the proper life of the soul: living in it imports that natural propensity he has to sin, and the continual delight he takes in it, as in his element, and living to it, as if that were the very purpose of his being. In that state neither his body nor his mind stirs without sin. Setting aside his manifest breaches of the Law, those actions that are evidently and totally sinful, his natural actions, his eating and drinking, his religious actions, his praying, and hearing, and preaching are sin at the bottom. And generally, his heart is nothing more than a forge of sin. *Every imagination*, every fiction of things framed there, is *only evil continually;*[165] every day, and all the day long; it is his very trade and life.

Now, in opposition to this life of sin, this living in it, and to it, a Christian is said to die to sin, to be cut off or separated from it. In our miserable natural state, there is as close a union between us and sin, as between our souls and bodies: it lives in us, and we in it, and the longer we live in that condition, the more the union grows, and the harder it is to dissolve it; and it is as old as the union of soul and body, begun with it, so that nothing but the death here spoken of can part them. And this death, in this relative sense, is mutual; in the work of conversion, sin dies, and the soul dies to sin, and these two are really one and the same thing. The Spirit of God kills both at one blow, sin in the soul, and the soul to sin—as the Apostle says of himself and the world, each is crucified to the other.[166]

And there are in it chiefly these two things, which make the difference, [1.] The solidity, and [2.] The universality of this change here represented under the notion of Death.

Many things may come between a man and the commission of various sins that he might have great affection for. Some restraints, either outward or inward, may be upon him—the authority of others, the fear of shame or punishment, or the check of an enlightened conscience—and while because of these, he doesn't commit the sin that he would, yet he lives in it, because he loves it, because he would commit it—as we say the soul lives not so much where it animates, as where it loves. And generally, that metaphorical kind of life, by which man is said to live in anything, has its principal seat in the affection: that is the immediate link of the union in such a life; and the untying and death consists chiefly in the disengagement of the heart, the breaking off the affection from it. *You who love the Lord*, says the Psalmist, *hate evil*.[167] An unrenewed mind might have some temporary dislikes even of its beloved sins in cold blood, but it returns to like them within a while. A man might not only have times of cessation from his usual way of sinning, but, because of the society where he is, and the withdrawal of occasions to sin, and various other causes, his very desire after it may seem to himself to be abated, and yet he may not be dead to sin, but only asleep to it. Therefore, when a temptation, backed with opportunity and other inducing circumstances, comes and jogs him, he awakes, and arises, and follows it.

A man may for a while, distaste some meat which he loves, (possibly upon a surfeit,) but he quickly regains his liking of it. Every quarrel with sin, every fit of dislike to it, is not the hatred that is implied in dying to sin. Upon the lively representation of the deformity of his sin to his mind, certainly a natural man might fall out with it; but this is but as the little jars of husband and wife, which are far from dissolving the marriage: it is not a fixed hatred, such as amongst the Jews inferred a divorce—If you hate her, put her away; that is to die to it, as by a legal divorce the husband and wife are civilly dead one to another in regard of the tie and use of marriage.

Again; some men's education, and custom, and moral principles, may free them from the grossest kind of sins, yea, a man's temperament may be disinclined to them, but they are alive to their own kind of sins, such as possibly are not so deformed in the common account, covetousness, or pride, or hardness of heart, and either a hatred or a disdain of the ways of holiness which are too strict for them, and exceed their size. Besides, for the good of human society, and for the interest of His own Church and people, God restrains many natural men from the height of wickedness, and gives them moral virtues. There are very many, and very common sins, which more refined natures, it may be, are scarcely tempted to; but as in their diet, and apparel, and other things in their natural life, they have the same kind of being with other persons, though they are more neat and elegant, so, in this living to sin, they live the same life with other ungodly men, though with a little more delicacy.

They don't consider that the devils are not in themselves subject to, nor capable of, many of those sins that are accounted grossest amongst men, and yet are greater rebels and enemies to God than men are.

But to be *dead to sin* goes deeper, and extends further than all this; it involves a most inward alienation of heart from sin, and most universal from all sin, an antipathy to the most beloved sin. Not only must the believer forbear sin, but hate it—*I hate vain thoughts;*[168] and not only does he hate some, but all—*I hate every false way*.[169] A stroke at the heart does it, which is the most certain and quickest death of any wound. For in this dying to sin, the whole man of necessity dies to it: the mind dies to the device and study of sin, that vein of invention becomes dead; the hand dies to the acting of it; the ear, to the delightful hearing of things profane and sinful; the tongue, to the world's dialect of oaths, and rotten speaking, and slander, and evil-speaking, which is the most common piece of the tongue's life in sin,—the very natural heat of sin exerts and vents itself most that way: the eye becomes dead to that intemperate look that Solomon speaks of, when he cautions us against eyeing the wine when it is red, and well-colored in the cup:[170] it is not taken with looking on the glittering skin of that serpent until it bites and stings, as there he adds. It becomes also dead to that unchaste look which kindles fire in the heart, to which Job blindfolded and deadened his eyes, by an express compact and agreement with them: *I made a covenant with my eyes*.[171]

The eye of a godly man is not fixed on the false sparkling of the world's pomp, honor, and wealth; it is dead to them, being quite dazzled with a greater beauty. The grass looks fine in the morning, when it is set with those liquid pearls, the drops of dew that shine upon it; but if you can look but a little while on the body of the sun, and then look down again, the eye is as it were dead; it sees not that faint shining on the earth that it thought so gay before: and as the eye is blinded, and dies to it, so, within a few hours, that gaiety quite vanishes and dies itself.

Men think it strange that the godly are not fond of their diet, that their appetite is not stirred with the delights of dainties; they know not that those who are Christians indeed are dead to those things, and the best dishes that are set before a dead man give him not a stomach. The godly man's throat is cut to those meats,[172] as Solomon advises in another subject. But can't you be a little more sociable to follow the fashion of the world, and take a share with your neighbors, some may say, without so precisely and narrowly examining everything? It is true, says the Christian, that the time was when I consulted as little with conscience as others, but sought myself, and pleased myself, as they do, and looked no further; but that was when I was alive to those ways; but now, truly I am dead to them—and can you look for activity and conversation from a dead man? The pleasures of sin in which I lived are still the same, but *I* am not the same. Are you such a sneak and a fool, says the natural man, as to bear affronts, and swallow them, and say nothing? Can you allow yourself to be so abused by such and such a wrong? Indeed, says the Christian again, I could once have resented an injury, as you or another would, and had somewhat of what you call high-heartedness, when I was alive after your fashion; but now that humor is not only something cooled, but it is killed in me; it is cold dead, as you say; and a greater Spirit, I think, than my own, has taught me another lesson, has made me both deaf and dumb that way, and has given me a new vent, and another language, and another Party to speak to on such occasions. *Those who seek my hurt,* says David, *speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long*. What does he do in this case? *But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that opens not his mouth*. And why? *For in you, O Lord, do I hope*.[173] And for this deadness that you despise, I have seen Him who died for me, *who when he was reviled, reviled not again*.

This is the true character of a Christian; he is dead to sin. But alas! where is this Christian to be found? And yet thus is everyone who truly partakes of Christ; he is dead to sin really. Hypocrites have a historical kind of death like this, as players in tragedies. Those players have loose bags of blood that receive the wound: so the hypocrite in some externals, and it may be, in that which is as near him as any outward thing, his purse, may suffer some bloodshed of that for Christ. But this death to sin is not a swooning fit, which one may recover out of again: the Apostle adds, that the believer is buried with Christ.[174]

But this is an unpleasant subject, to talk thus of death and burial. The very name of death, in the softest sense it can have, makes a sour, melancholy discourse. It is so indeed, if you take it alone, if there were not, for the life that is lost, a far better one immediately following: but so it is here: living unto righteousness, succeeds dying to sin.

That which makes natural death so fearful, the *King of terrors*,[175] as Job calls it, is mainly this faint belief and assurance of the resurrection and glory to come; and without this, all men's moral resolutions and discourses are too weak cordials against this fear. They may set a good face on it, and speak big, and so cover the fear they cannot cure; but certainly, those are a little ridiculous, who would persuade men to be content to die, by reasoning from the necessity and unavoidableness of it, which, taken alone, rather may beget a desperate discontentment than a quiet compliance. The very weakness of that argument is, that it is too strong *durum telum*—a hard weapon. That of company is fantastic: it may please the imagination, but it does not satisfy the judgment. Nor are the miseries of life, though an argument somewhat more proper, a full incentive to meet death without reluctance; the oldest, the most decrepit, and most diseased persons, yet naturally fall not out with life, but could have a mind to it still; and the very truth is this, the worst cottage anyone dwells in, he is loath to go out of, till he knows of a better. And the reason why that which is so hideous to others, was so sweet to Martyrs, and other godly men who have heartily embraced death, and welcomed it though in very terrible shapes, was because they had firm assurance of immortality beyond it.[176] The ugly death's head, when the light of glory shines through the holes of it, is comely and lovely. To look upon Death as Eternity's birthday, is that which makes it not only tolerable, but amiable. *Hic dies postremus, aeterni natalis est*—This last day is the birthday of eternity,—is the word I admire more than any other that ever dropped from a heathen.

Thus here, the strongest inducement to this death is the true notion and contemplation of this life to which it transfers us. It is most necessary to represent this, for a natural man has as great an aversion every whit from this figurative death, this dying to sin, as from natural death; and there is the greater necessity of persuading him to this, because his consent is necessary to it. No man dies this death to sin unwillingly, although no man is naturally willing to it. Much of this death consists in a man's consenting thus to die; and this is not only a lawful, but a laudable, yea, a necessary self-murder. *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth*,[177] says the Apostle. Now no sinner would be content to die to sin, if that were all; but if it is passing to a more excellent life, then he gains, and it were a folly not to seek this death. It was a strange power of Plato's discourse of the soul's immortality, that moved a young man, upon reading it, to throw himself into the sea, that he might leap through it to that immortality; but truly, were this life of God, this life to righteousness, and the excellence and delight of it known, it would gain many minds to this death whereby we step into it.

But there is a necessity of a new being as the principle of new action and motion. The Apostle says, *For when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness;*[178] so it is, while you were alive to sin, you were dead to righteousness. But there is a new breath of life from Heaven breathed on the soul. Then the soul lives indeed, when it is one with God, and sees light in His light[179]—has a spiritual knowledge of Him, and therefore sovereignly loves Him, and delights in His will. And this is indeed to live unto righteousness, which, in a comprehensive sense, takes in the whole frame of the Christian life, and all the duties of it towards God and towards men.

By this new nature, the very natural motion of the soul so taken, is obedience to God; and walking in the paths of righteousness, it can no more live in the habit and ways of sin, than a man can live under water. Sin is not the Christian's element; it is as much too gross for his renewed soul, as the water is for his body—he may fall into it, but he cannot breathe in it; cannot take delight, and continue to live in it. *But his delight is in the law of the Lord;*[180] that is the walk that his soul refreshes itself in; he loves it entirely, and loves it most, where it most crosses the remainders of corruption that are within him. He bends the strength of his soul to please God; aims wholly at that; it takes up his thoughts early and late. He has no other purpose in his being and living, than only to honor his Lord. This is to live unto righteousness. He does not make a pastime of it, a study for his spare hours—no, it is his main business, his all. *In his law does he meditate day and night*. This life, like the natural one, is seated in the heart, and from there diffuses itself to the whole man; he loves righteousness and receives the truth (as the Apostle speaks) in the love of it. A natural man may do many things, which, as to their shell and outside, are righteous; but he lives not to righteousness, because his heart is not possessed and ruled by the love of it. But this life makes the godly man delight to walk uprightly and to speak of righteousness; his language and ways carry the resemblance of his heart. I know it is easiest to act the part of religion that is in the tongue, but the Christian, nevertheless, ought not to be spiritually dumb. Because some birds are taught to speak, men do not for that give it over, and stop speaking. *The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of judgment*. And his feet strive to keep pace with his tongue, which gives evidence of its sincerity—*None of his steps shall slide*, or, he shall not stagger in his steps. But that which is between these, is the common spring of both: *The law of God is in his heart*,[181] and from there, as Solomon says, *are the issues of life*.[182] The law in his heart is the principle of this living to righteousness.

2. The second thing here, is, that it was the design of the sufferings and death of Christ, to produce in us this death and life: *He bore sin*, and died for it, that we might die to it.

Out of some conviction of the consequence of sin, many have a confused desire to be justified, to have sin pardoned, but look no further—they don't think about the importance and necessity of Sanctification, the nature of which is expressed by this dying to sin, and living to righteousness.

But here we see that Sanctification is necessary as inseparably connected with Justification, not only as its companion, but also as its end, which, in some sort, raises it above the other. We see that it was the thing that God eyed and intended, in taking away the guiltiness of sin, that we might be renewed and sanctified. If we compare them in point of time; if we look backward, holiness was always necessary for happiness; but satisfaction for sin, and the pardon of it, were made necessary by sin: or, if we look forward, the state we are appointed to, and for which we have been delivered from wrath, is an state of perfect holiness. When we reflect upon that great work of redemption, we see it aimed at there, redeemed to be holy.[183] And if we go yet higher, to the very spring, the decree of election, with regard to that it is said, *Chosen before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy*.[184] And the end shall suit the design: nothing shall enter into the New Jerusalem that is defiled or unholy; nothing but perfect purity is there; not a spot of sinful pollution, not a wrinkle of the old man. For this end was that great work undertaken by the Son of God, that He might frame out of polluted mankind a new and holy generation for His Father, who might surround His throne in the life of glory, and give Him pure praises, and behold His face in that eternity. Now for this end it was necessary, according to the all-wise purpose of the Father, that the guiltiness of sin and sentence of death should be once removed; and thus the burden of that lay upon Christ's shoulders on the cross. That done, it is further necessary that souls so delivered should be likewise purged and renewed, for they are designed for perfection of holiness in the end, and it must begin here.

Yet it is not possible to persuade men of this, that Christ had this in His eye and purpose when He was lifted up on the cross, and looked upon the whole company of those His Father had given Him to save, that He would redeem them to be a number of holy persons. We would be redeemed; who is there who would not? But Christ would have His redeemed ones holy; and those who are not true to this His end, but cross and oppose Him in it, may hear of redemption long and often, but little to their comfort. Are you resolved still to abuse and delude yourselves? Well, whether you will believe it or not, this is once more told you: there is unspeakable comfort in the death of Christ, but it belongs only to those who are dead to sin, and alive to righteousness. This circle shuts out the impenitent world; there it closes, and cannot be broken through; but all who are penitent, are by their effectual calling lifted into it, translated from that accursed condition wherein they were. So then, if you will live in your sins, you may; but then, resolve to bear them yourselves, for Christ, in His bearing of sin, meant the benefit of none but those who are in due time thus dead, and thus alive with Him.

3. But then, in the third place, Christ's sufferings and death effect all this. [1.] As the exemplary cause, the lively contemplation of Christ crucified, is the most powerful of all thoughts, to separate the heart and sin. But [2.] besides this example, working as a moral cause, Christ is the effective natural cause of this death and life; for He is one with believers, and there is a real influence of His death and life into their souls. This mysterious union of Christ and believers, is that upon which both their justification and sanctification, the whole frame of their salvation and happiness, depend. And in this particular view the Apostle still insists on it, speaking of Christ and believers as one in His death and resurrection, crucified with Him, dead with Him, buried with Him and risen with Him.[185] Being arisen He applies His death to those He died for, and by it kills the life of sin in them, and so is avenged on it for its being the cause of His death: according to that expression of the Psalmist, *Raise me up, that I may requite them*.[186] Christ infuses, and then actuates and stirs up that faith and love in them, by which they are united to Him; and these work powerfully in producing this.

[3.] Faith looks so steadfastly upon its suffering Savior, that, as they say, *Intellectus fit illud quod intelligit*—The mind becomes that which it contemplates. It makes the soul like Him, assimilates and conforms it to His death, as the Apostle speaks.[187] That which some fabulously say of some of their saints, that they received the impression of the wounds of Christ in their body, is true, in a spiritual sense, of the soul of everyone who is indeed a saint and a believer; it takes the very print of His death, by beholding Him, and dies to sin; and then takes that of His rising again, and lives to righteousness. As it applies it to justify, so to mortify, drawing virtue from it. Thus said one, "Christ aimed at this in all those sufferings which, with so much love, He went through; and shall I disappoint Him, and not serve His end?"

[4.] The other powerful grace of *love* joins in this work with faith; for love desires nothing more than likeness and conformity: though it be a painful resemblance, so much the better and fitter to testify love. Therefore it will have the soul die with Him who died for it, and the very same kind of death: *I am crucified with Christ*,[188] says the great Apostle. The love of Christ in the soul takes the very nails that fastened Him to the cross, and crucifies the soul to the world, and to sin. Love is strong as death, particularly in this. The strongest and liveliest body, when death seizes it, must yield, and that become motionless, which was so vigorous before: thus the soul that is most active and unwearied in sin, when this love seizes it, is killed to sin; and as death separates a man from his dearest friends and society, this love breaks all its ties and friendship with sin. Generally, as Plato has it, love takes away one's living in one's self, and transfers it into the party loved: but the Divine love of Christ does it in the truest and highest manner.

By whose stripes you were healed.] The misery of fallen man, and the mercy of his deliverance, are both of such a depth that no single expression, yea, no variety of expressions, added one to another, can reach their bottom. Here we have some very significant ones. 1. The guiltiness of sin as an intolerable burden, pressing the soul and sinking it, and that transferred and laid on a stronger back: *He bore*. Then, 2. The same wretchedness, under the notion of a strange disease, by all other means incurable, *healed by His stripes*. And, 3. It is again represented by the forlorn condition of a sheep wandering, and our salvation to be found only in the love and wisdom of our great Shepherd. And all these are borrowed from that sweet and clear prophecy in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

The polluted nature of man is none other than a bundle of desperate diseases: he is spiritually dead, as the Scriptures often teach. Now this doesn't contradict, or at all lessen the matter; but only because this misery, justly called death, exists in a subject animated with a natural life, therefore, so considered, it may bear the name and sense of sickness, or wounds: and therefore it is a gross mistake,—they are as much out in their argument as in their conclusion, who would extract out of these expressions, any evidence that there are remains of spiritual life or good in our corrupted nature. But they are not worthy the contest, though vain heads think to argue themselves into life, and are seeking the life, by logic, in miserable nature, that they should seek, by faith, in Jesus Christ, namely, in these His stripes by which we are healed.

It would be a large task to name our spiritual maladies; how much more to unfold their various natures! Such a multitude of corrupt false principles in the mind, which, as gangrene, spread themselves through the soul, and defile the whole man; that total gross blindness and unbelief in spiritual things, and that stone of the heart, hardness and impenitence; lethargies of senselessness and security; and then, (for there are such complications of spiritual diseases in us, as in natural, are altogether impossible,) such burning fevers of inordinate affections and desires, of lust, and malice, and envy, such racking and tormenting cares of covetousness, and feeding on earth and ashes,[189] (as the Prophet speaks in another case,) according to the depraved appetite that accompanies some diseases; such tumours of pride and self-conceit, that break forth, as filthy blotches, in men's words and behavior with one another! In a word, what a strange disorder must be in the natural soul, by the frequent interchanges and fight of contrary passions within it! And, besides all these, how many deadly wounds do we receive from without, by the temptations of Satan and the world! We entertain them, and by the weapons with which they furnish us, we willingly wound ourselves; as the Apostle says, *Those who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows*.[190]

If we could see it, no infirmary or hospital was ever so full of loathsome and miserable spectacles, as in a spiritual sense, our wretched nature is in any one of us apart—how much more when multitudes of us meet together? But our evils are hidden from us, and we perish miserably in a dream of happiness. This makes up and completes our wretchedness, that we feel it not with our other diseases; and this makes it worse still. This was the Church's disease,[191] *You say, I am rich,—and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor*, &c. We are usually full of complaints of trifling griefs which are of little importance, and don't think about, or feel our dangerous maladies; as he who showed a physician his sore finger, but the physician told him taht he had more need to think on the cure of a dangerous imposthume (abscess) within him, which he perceived by looking at him, though himself did not feel it.

In dangerous maladies or wounds, there are these evils: a tendency to death, and with that, the apprehension of the terror and fear of it, and the present distemper of the body. So, there are in sin, 1. The guiltiness of sin binding over the soul to death, the most frightful, eternal death; 2. The terror of conscience in the apprehension of that death, or the wrath that is the consequence and end of sin; 3. The raging and prevailing power of sin, which is the ill habitude and distemper of the soul. But these stripes, and the blood that issued from them, are a sound cure. Applied to the soul, they take away the guiltiness of sin, and death deserved, and free us from our engagement to the everlasting scourgings and lashes of the wrath of God; and they are likewise the only cure for the present terrors and pangs of conscience, arising from the sense of that wrath, and sentence of death upon the soul. Our iniquities which met on Him, laid open to the rod His back which in itself was free. Those hands that never worked iniquity, and those feet that never departed from the way of righteousness, yet, for our works and wanderings, were pierced; and that tongue dropped with vinegar and gall on the cross, which never spoke a guileful or sinful word. The blood of those stripes is the balm issuing from that Tree of Life so pierced, which alone can give ease to the conscience, and heal the wounds of it: they deliver from the power of sin, working by their influence a loathing of sin, which was the cause of them; they cleanse out the vicious humors of our corrupt nature, by opening that issue of repentance; They shall look on Him, and mourn over Him whom they have pierced.[192]

Now, in order for it to cure, it must be applied; it is the only remedy; but, in order to heal, it must be received. The most sovereign medicines cure not in any other manner, and, therefore, still their first letter is R, *Remedy*, take such a thing.

This is amongst the wonders of that great work, that the sovereign Lord of all, who binds and looses at His pleasure the influences of Heaven, and the power and workings of all the creatures, would Himself in our flesh be thus bound—the only Son bound as a slave, and scourged as a malefactor! And His willing obedience made this an acceptable and expiating sacrifice, amongst the rest of His sufferings: *I gave my back to the smiters*.[193]

Now, it cannot be that anyone who is thus healed, reflecting upon this cure, can again take any constant delight in sin. It is impossible so far to forget both the grief it gave *them*, and that which it cost their Lord, as to make a new agreement with it, to live in the pleasure of it.

His stripes.] Turn your thoughts, each one of you, to consider this; you who are not healed, that you may be healed; and you who are, apply it still to perfect the cure in the part in which it is gradual and incomplete; and for the ease you have found, bless and love Him who endured so much uneasiness to that end. There is a sweet mixture of sorrow and joy in contemplating these stripes; sorrow, surely, by sympathy, that they were His stripes; and joy, that they were our healing. Christians are too little aware and sensible of this, and, it may be, are somewhat guilty of that with which Ephraim is charged: *They knew not that I healed them*.[194]

1Pe 2:25

Ver. 25. For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

In these few words, we have a brief, yet clear representation of the wretchedness of our natural condition, and of our happiness in Christ. The resemblance is borrowed from the same place in the prophet Isaiah.[195]

Not to press the comparison, or as is too common with commentators, to strain it beyond the purpose, in reference to our lost state, this is all, or the main circumstance in which the resemblance with sheep holds,—our wandering, as forlorn and exposed to destruction, like a sheep that has strayed and wandered from the fold. So taken, it signifies, indeed, the loss of a better condition, the loss of the safety and happiness of the soul, of the good that is proper to it, as the suitable good of the brute creature here named is safe and good pasture.

So we may know that no one is exempt in nature from the guiltiness and misery of this wandering, the Prophet is explicit as to the universality of it. *All we have gone astray*. And the Apostle here applies it in particular to his brethren; so it falls not wrongly to any others. *You were as sheep going astray*. Yea, the Prophet there, to the collective universal, adds a distributive, *Every man to his own way*, or, a man to his way. They agree in this, that they all wander, though they differ in their several ways. There is an inbred proneness to stray in all of them, more than in sheep which are creatures naturally wandering, for each man has his own way.

And this is our folly, that we flatter ourselves by comparison, and everyone is pleased with himself because he is free from some wanderings of others; not considering that he is a wanderer too, though in another way; he has his way, as those he looks on have theirs. And as men agree in wandering, though they differ in their way, so those ways agree in this, that they lead to misery, and shall end in that. Do you think that the only way to Hell is by the way of open profaneness? Yes, surely, many ways seem smooth and clean in a man's own eyes, and yet will end in condemnation.[196] Truth is but one; Error endless and interminable. As we say of natural life and death, so may we say regarding spiritual, the way to life is one, but there are many out of it. *Lethi mille aditus*—a thousand avenues to death. Not everyone has the opportunity or ability for every sin, or every degree of sin, but each sins after his own mode and power.[197]

Your tongue, it may be, doesn't wander in the common pathway of oaths and curses, yet it wanders in secret slanders, in detraction and defamation of others, though so conveyed as it scarcely appears; or, if you speak them not, yet you are pleased to hear them. It wanders, in trifling away the precious hours of irrecoverable time with vain, unprofitable babblings in your conversation—or, if you are often alone, or silent in company, does not your foolish mind still hunt vanity, following one self-pleasing scheme or the other, and seldom, and very slightly, if at all, converse with God and the things of Heaven, which, although they only have the truest and the highest pleasure in them, your carnal mind finds them tasteless and unsavory? There is scarcely anything so light and childish that you will not more willingly and liberally bestow your retired thoughts on, than upon those excellent, incomparable delights. Oh, the foolish heart of man! When it may seem deep and serious, how often is it at Domitian's exercise in his study, catching flies!

Men think little of the wandering of their hearts, and yet truly, that is most of all to be considered; for *out of it are the issues of life*.[198] It is the heart that has forgotten God, and is roving after vanity—this causes all the errors of men's words and actions. A wandering heart makes wandering eyes, feet, and tongue: it is the leading wanderer that misleads all the rest. And as we are here called straying sheep, so, within the heart itself of each of us, there is as it were a whole wandering flock, a multitude of fictions, ungodly devices.[199] The word that signifies the evil of the thought in Hebrew is taken from that which signifies feeding of a flock, and it likewise signifies wandering; and so these meet in our thoughts, they are a great flock and a wandering flock. This is the natural freedom of our thoughts—they are free to wander from God and Heaven, and to carry us to perdition. And we are guilty of much pollution in thought, which we never act on in deed. Men are less aware of heart wickedness, if it doesn't break forth; but the heart is far more active in sin than any of the senses, or the whole body. The motion of spirits is far swifter than that of bodies. The mind can go more distance in any of these wanderings in one hour, than the body is able to follow in many days.

When the body is tied to attendance in the exercises in which we are employed, yet, know you not,—it is so much the worse if you do not know, and feel it, and bewail it,—know you not, I say, that the heart can take its liberty, and leave you nothing but a carcass? This the unrenewed heart does continually. *They come to you,—and they sit before you as my people,—but their heart goes after their covetousness*.[200] It has another way to go, another god to wait on.

But are now returned.] Whatever are the several ways of our straying, all our wandering is the aversion of the heart from God, which of necessity follows a continual unsettledness and disquiet. The mind, as a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed,[201] tumbles from one sin and vanity to another, and finds no rest; or, as a sick person tosses from one side to another, and from one part of his bed to another, and perhaps changes his bed, in hope of ease, but still it is further off, thus is the soul in all its wanderings. But shift and change as it will, no rest shall it find until it comes to this returning. *Why gad you about so much to change your way? You also shall be ashamed of Egypt, as you were ashamed of Assyria*.[202] Nothing but sorrow and shame, until you change all those ways for this one. Return, O Israel, says the Lord, if you will return, return unto Me. It is not changing one of your own ways for another, that will profit you; but in returning to Me is your salvation.

Since we find in our own experience, besides the woeful end of our wanderings, the present perplexity and disquiet of them, why are we not persuaded to this, to give them all up? *Return unto your rest, O my soul*,[203] says David: this is our wisdom.

But is not that God in whom we expect rest incensed against us for our wandering? and is He not, being offended, *a consuming fire?* True, but this is the way to find acceptance and peace, and satisfying comforts in returning. Come first to this Shepherd of souls, Jesus Christ, and by Him, come to the Father. *No man comes unto the Father*, says He, *but by me.*[204] This is *via regia*—the royal way, the high and right way of returning to God. John 10:11—*I am the good shepherd;* and ver. 9, *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.* But if he misses this Door, he shall miss salvation too. *You are returned*, says our Apostle, *unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*.

There are three things necessary to restore us to our happiness, when we have departed in our wanderings: 1. To take away the guiltiness of those former wanderings. 2. To reduce us into the way again. 3. To keep and lead us in it.

Now all these can only be performed by this great Shepherd. 1. He satisfied the offence of our wanderings, and removed our guiltiness. He Himself, the Shepherd, became a sacrifice for His flock, a sheep, or spotless lamb. So Isa. 53:6, *We like sheep have gone astray*, and immediately after the mention of our straying it is added, *The Lord has laid*, or, *made meet on Him, the iniquity of us all*, of all our strayings; and ver. 7, *He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.* He who is our Shepherd, the same is the Lamb for sacrifice. So our Apostle (ch. 1), We are redeemed, not by silver and gold, *but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*. So John 10:11, He is the good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. Men don't think on this; many of them who have some thoughts of returning and amendment, think not that there is a satisfaction due for past wanderings; and therefore they pass by Christ, and consider not the necessity of returning to Him, and by Him to the Father.

2. He brings them back into the way of life: *You are returned*. But don't think that it is by their own knowledge and skill that they discover their error, and find the right path, or that by their own strength they return to it. No, if we would contest grammaticisms, the word here is passive: *you are returned*, reduced, or caused to return. But this truth hangs not on such weak notions as are often used, either for or against it. In that prophecy, Ezek. 34:16, God says, *I will seek and bring again*, &c. And David says, *He restores* (or *returns*) *my soul*.[205] And that this is the work of this Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, God-man, is clearly and frequently taught in the Gospel. He came for this very end: it was His errand and business in the world, *to seek and to save that which was lost*.[206] And thus it is represented in the parable, He goes *after that which is lost, until he finds it*, and then having found it, not only shows it the way, and says to it, Return, and so leave it to come after, but *he lays it on his shoulder*, and brings it home; and notwithstanding all his pains, instead of complaining against it for wandering, he rejoices in that he has found and recovered it: *he lays it on his shoulder rejoicing*.[207] And in this, there is as much of the resemblance as in any other thing. Lost man can no more return unsought, than a sheep that wanders, which is observed of all creatures to have least of that skill. Men may have some confused thoughts of returning, but to know the way and to come, unless they are sought out, they are unable. This is David's appeal, though acquainted with the fold, *I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant*.[208] This is what our great and good Shepherd did; through the difficult ways He was to pass for finding us, in which He not only hazarded, but really laid down His life; and those shoulders which bore the iniquity of our wanderings by expiation, are the same that carry and bring us back from it by effectual conversion.

3. He keeps and leads us on in the way to which He has restored us. He leaves us not again to try our own skill, whether we can walk to Heaven alone, being set in the path of it, but He still conducts us in it by His own hand, and that is the cause of our persisting in it, and attaining the blessed end of it. *He restores my soul*, says the Psalmist; and that is not all: he adds, *He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake*.[209] Those paths are the green pastures meant, and the *still waters* that he speaks of.[210] And thus we may be resolved if we are of His flock. Are we led in the paths of righteousness? Do we delight ourselves in Him, and in His ways? Are they the proper refreshment of our souls? Do we find His words sweet to our taste? Are we taken with the green pastures in it, and the crystal streams of consolations that glide through it? Can we discern His voice, and does it draw our hearts, so that we follow it?[211]

The Shepherd and Bishop.] It was the style of Kings to be called Shepherds; and it is the dignity of the Ministers of the Gospel to have both these names. But this great Shepherd and Bishop is peculiarly worthy of these names, as supreme; He alone is the universal Shepherd and Bishop, and none but an antichrist, who makes himself as Christ, killing and destroying the flock, will assume this title, which belongs only to the Lord, the great Owner of His flock. He Himself is their great Shepherd and Bishop. All shepherds and bishops who are truly such, have their function and place from Him; they hold of Him, and follow His rule and example, in their inspection of the flock. It would be the happiness of kingdoms, if magistrates and kings would set Him, His love, and meekness and equity, before their eyes in their government. And all those who are properly His bishops, are especially obliged to study this pattern, to warm their affections to the flock, and to excite a tender care for their salvation, by looking on this *Arch-bishop* and *Arch-shepherd*, (as our Apostle calls Him,) and in their measure, to follow His footsteps, spending their life and strength in seeking the good of His sheep, considering that they are subordinately shepherds of souls, that is, in dispensing spiritual things so communicable.

The Lord Jesus is supremely and singularly such; those under Him are shepherds of souls, because their diligence concerns the soul, which excludes not the body in spiritual respects, as it is capable of things spiritual and eternal, by its union with the soul. But Christ is sovereign Shepherd of souls above all, and singularly, in that He not only teaches them the doctrine of salvation, but purchased salvation for them, and inasmuch as He reaches the soul powerfully, which ministers cannot do by their own power. He lays hold on it, and restores, and leads it, and causes it to walk in His ways. In this sense it agrees to Him alone, as supreme, in the incommunicable sense.

And from His guidance, power, and love, flows all the comfort of His flock. When they consider their own folly and weakness, this only gives them confidence, that His hand guides them; and they believe in His strength, far surpassing that of the roaring lion, His wisdom, in knowing their particular state and their weakness, and His tender love, in pitying them, and applying Himself to it. Other shepherds, even faithful ones, may mistake them, and not know the way of leading them in some particulars, and they may be sometimes lacking in that tender affection that they owe; or, if they have that, yet they are not able to bear them up, and support them powerfully; but this Shepherd is perfect in all these respects. The young and weak Christian, or the elder at weak times, when they are big and heavy with some inward exercise of mind, which shall bring forth advantage and peace to them afterwards, them He leads gently, and uses them with the tenderness that their weakness requires.[212]

And, in the general, He provides for His flock, and heals them when they are hurt in any way, and washes them and makes them fruitful; so that they are as the flock, described in Cant. 4:2; they are comely, but their Shepherd much more so: *Formosi pecoris custos, formosior ipse*—The keeper of a lovely flock, himself more lovely. They are given to Him in the Father's purpose and choice, and so, those who return, are, even while they wander, sheep in some other sense than the rest that perish. They are, in the secret love of election, of Christ's sheepfold, though not as yet actually brought into it. But when His time comes, wherever they wander, and however far off , even those who have strayed most, yet He restores them, and rejoices Heaven with their return, and leads them until He brings them to partake of the joy that is there. That is the end of the way in which He guides them. *My sheep hear my voice—and they follow me*.[213] And they shall never repent of having done so. To follow Him, is to follow life, for He is the life. He is in that glory which we desire; and where would we be, if not where He is, who, at His departure from the world, said, *Where I am, there you may be also?*[214] To this happy meeting and heavenly abode, may God, of His infinite mercy, bring us, through *Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen*.