

## Exposition of Psalm 119

### Verses 1-25

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#### **1. *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.***

This most interesting and instructive Psalm, like the Psalter itself, "opens with a Beatitude for our comfort and encouragement, directing us immediately to that happiness, which all mankind in different ways are seeking and inquiring after. All would secure themselves from the incursions of misery; but all do not consider that misery is the offspring of sin, from which therefore it is necessary to be delivered and preserved, in order to become happy or *blessed*." (*Bishop Horne*)

The *undefiled* character described in this verse marks, in an evangelical sense, "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit", not one who is without sin, but one who in the sincerity of his heart can say, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

As his *way* is, so is his "*walk*", "in the law of the Lord." He is "strengthened in the Lord, and he walks up and down in His name;" his "ears hearing a word behind him, saying, This is the way—walk in it"—when he is "turning to the right hand or to the left." And if the pardon of sin, imputation of righteousness, the communion of saints, and a sense of acceptance with God; if protection in providence and grace; and—finally and forever, the beatific vision, are the sealed privileges of His upright people, then there can be no doubt, that "*blessed are the undefiled in the way*." And if temporal prosperity, spiritual renovation and fruitfulness, increasing illumination, fellowship with the Savior, peace within, and—throughout eternity—a right to the tree of life, are privileges of incalculable value; then surely "*the walk in the law of the Lord*" is "the path of pleasantness and peace." "Truly"—indeed may we say, "God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."

But let each of us ask—What is the "*way*" of my heart with God? Is it always an "*undefiled way*?" Is "iniquity" never "regarded in the heart?" Is all that God hates habitually lamented, abhorred, forsaken? "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Again—What is my "walk?" Is it from the living principle of union with Christ? This is the direct—the only source of spiritual life. We are first quickened in Him. Then we walk in Him and after Him. Oh! that this my walk may be steady, consistent, advancing! Oh! that I may be ever listening to my Father's voice, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be perfect!"

Is there not enough of defilement in the most "*undefiled way*," and enough of inconsistency in the most consistent "*walk*" to endear to us the gracious declaration of the gospel, "If any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous?"

## **2. Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, and who seek Him with the whole heart.**

The "testimony," in the singular number, usually denotes the whole canon of the inspired writings—the revelation of the will of God to mankind—the standard of their faith. "*Testimonies*" appear, chiefly, to mark the *preceptive* part of Scripture; that part, in which this man of God always found his spiritual delight and perfect freedom. Mark his language: "*I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. Your testimonies have I taken as a heritage forever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.*" Not, however, that this blessedness belongs to the mere outward act of obedience; but rather to that practical habit of mind, which seeks to know the will of God in order to "*keep*" it. This habit is under the influence of the promise of God, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them." And in thus "*keeping the testimonies of God*," the believer maintains the character of one, that "*seeks Him with the whole heart.*"

Oh! how many seek, and seek in vain, for no other reason, than because they do not "*seek Him with the whole heart!*" The worldling's "heart is divided; now shall he be found faulty." The professor "with his mouth shows much love; but his heart goes after his covetousness." The backslider "*has not turned unto Me with his whole heart*, but feignedly, says the Lord." The faithful, upright believer alone brings his heart, *his whole heart*, to the Lord: "When You said, Seek my face, my heart said unto You, Your face, Lord, will I seek." For he alone has found an object, that attracts and fills his whole heart, and, if he had a thousand hearts, would attract and fill them all. He has found his way to God by faith in Jesus. In that way he continues to seek. His whole heart is engaged to know and love more and more. Here alone the blessing is enjoyed, and the promise made good: "*You shall seek Me, and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart.*"

But let me not shrink from the question, Do I "*keep His testimonies*" from constraint, or from love? Surely when I consider my own natural aversion and enmity to the law of God, and the danger of self-deception in the external service

of the Lord, I have much need to pray, *"Incline my heart to Your testimonies. Give me understanding—save me, and I shall keep Your testimonies."* And if they are blessed, who seek the Lord *with their whole heart*, how am I seeking Him? Alas! with how much distraction! with how little heart-work! Oh! let me "seek His strength" in order to "seek His face."

Lord! search—teach—incline—uphold me. Help me to plead Your gracious promise, "I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; *for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart.*"

### **3. They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways.**

This was not their character from their birth. Once they were *doing* nothing but *iniquity*. It was iniquity without mixture, without cessation—from the fountain-head. Now it is written of them, *"they do no iniquity."* Once they walked, even as others, in the way of their own hearts, "enemies to God by wicked works." Now *"they walk in His ways."* They are "new creatures in Christ; old things are passed away; behold! all things are become new." This is their highly-privileged state, "Sin shall have no dominion over them: for they are not under the law, but under grace." They are "born of God, and they cannot practice sin: for his seed remains in them, and they cannot sin, because they are born of God." Their hatred and resistance to sin are therefore now as instinctive, as was their former enmity and opposition to God. Not, indeed, that the people of God are as "the saints made perfect," who *"do no iniquity."* This is a dream of perfection—unscriptural and self-deluding. The unceasing advocacy of their Heavenly Friend evidently supposes the indwelling power of sin, to the termination of our earthly pilgrimage. The supplication, also, in the prayer of our Lord teaches them to ask for daily pardon and deliverance from "temptation," as for "daily bread." Yes—to our shame be it spoken—we are sinners still; yet—praised be God!—not "walking after the course," not "fulfilling the desires," of sin. The acting of sin is now like the motion of a stone upward, violent and unnatural. If sin is not cast out, it is dethroned. We are not, as before, "its willing people," but its reluctant, struggling captives. It is not "the day of its power."

And here lies the holy liberty of the Gospel—not, as some have imagined—a liberty to "continue in sin, that grace may abound"; but a deliverance from the guilt and condemnation *of abhorred, resisted, yet still indwelling, sin*. When our better will has cast it off—when we can say in the sight of a heart-searching God, *"What we hate, that do we"*—the responsibility is not ours: "It is not we who do it, but sin which dwells in us."

Still let us inquire, is the promise of deliverance from sin sweet to us? And does our successful resistance in the spiritual conflict realize the pledge of its complete fulfillment? Blessed Jesus! what do, we owe to Your cross for the present

redemption from its guilt and curse, and much more for the blissful prospect of the glorified state, when this hated sin shall be an inhabitant no more forever! Oh, let us take the very print of Your death into our souls in the daily crucifixion of sin. Let us know the "power of Your resurrection," in a habitual "walk in newness of life."

#### **4. You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently.**

We have seen the character of the Man of God. Let us mark the authority of God, *commanding* him to a *diligent* obedience. The very sight of the command is enough for him. He obeys for the *command's* sake, however contrary it may be to his own will. But has he any reason to complain of the yoke? Even under the dispensation, which "genders unto bondage" most encouraging were the obligations to obedience, "*that it may be well* with them, and with their children forever." Much more, then, we, under a dispensation of love, can never lack a motive for obedience! Let the daily mercies of Providence stir up the question, "What shall I render to the Lord?" Let the far richer mercies of grace produce "a living sacrifice" to be "presented to the Lord." Let "the love of Christ constrain us." Let the recollection of the "price with which we were bought," remind us of the Lord's ownership in us, and of our obligations to "glorify Him in our body, and in our spirit, which are His." Let us only "behold the Lamb of God;" let us hear His wrestling supplications, His deserted cry, His expiring agonies—the price of our redemption; and then let us ask ourselves—Can we lack a motive?

But what is the scriptural character of evangelical obedience? It is the work of the Spirit, enabling us to "obey the truth." It is the end of the purpose of God, who "has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.*" It is the only satisfactory test of our profession.

Then let me begin my morning with the inquiry, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" "Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name." Let me trade with all my talents for You: ever watchful, that I may be employed in Your work; setting a guard upon my thoughts, my lips, my tempers, my pursuits, that nothing may hinder, but rather everything may help me, in *keeping Your precepts diligently.*

But why do I ever find *the precepts* to be "grievous" to me? Is it not that some indolence is indulged; or some "iniquity regarded in my heart;" or some principle of unfaithfulness divides my services with two masters, when I ought to be "following the Lord fully?" Oh! for the spirit of "simplicity and godly sincerity" in the precepts of God. Oh! for that warm and constant love, which is the main-spring of devoted diligence in the service of God. Oh! for a larger supply of that "wisdom which is from above," and which is "without partiality and without hypocrisy!"

### **5. *Oh that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!***

The Lord has indeed "*commanded us to keep His precepts.*" But, alas! where is our power? Satan would make the sense of our weakness an excuse for indolence. The Spirit of God convinces us of it, as an incitement to prayer, and an exercise of faith. If, Reader, your heart is right with God, you "consent to the law that it is good;" you "delight in it after the inner man;" you would not have one jot or tittle altered, mitigated, or repealed, that it might be more conformed to your own will, or allow you more liberty or self-indulgence in the ways of sin. But do you not sigh to think, that, when you aim at the perfect standard of holiness, you should, at your best moments, and in your highest attainments, fall so far below it; seeing indeed the way before you, but feeling yourself without ability to walk in it? Then let a sense of your helplessness for the work of the Lord lead you to the throne of grace, to pray, and watch, and wait, for the strengthening and refreshing influences of the Spirit of grace. Here let your faith realize at one and the same view your utter insufficiency, and your complete All-sufficiency. Here behold Him, who is ever presenting Himself before God as our glorious Head, receiving in Himself, according to the good pleasure of the Father, the full supply for this and every successive moment of inexpressible need. Our work is not therefore left upon our own hands, or wrought out at our "own charges." So long as he has the "Spirit of grace" he will be found "sufficient"—Divine "strength will be made perfect in weakness." "Without Him we can do nothing;" "through Him, all things." Even the "worm Jacob shall thresh the mountains," when the Lord says, "Fear not, I will help you."

In connecting this verse with the preceding, how accurately is the middle path preserved, equally distant from the idea of self-sufficiency to "*keep the Lord's statutes,*" and self justification in neglecting them! The first attempt to render spiritual obedience will quickly convince us of our utter helplessness. We might as soon create a world, as create in our hearts one pulse of spiritual life. And yet our inability does not cancel our obligation. Shall God lose His right, because sin has palsied our ability? Is not a drunken servant still under his master's law? and is not the sin which prevents him from performing his duty, not his excuse, but his aggravation? Thus our weakness is that of a heart, which "cannot be subject to the law of God," only because it is carnal, "enmity against God." The obligation therefore remains in full force. Our inability is our sin, our guilt, and condemnation.

What then remains for us, but to return the mandate to heaven, accompanied with an earnest prayer, that the Lord would write upon our hearts those *statutes*, to which He requires obedience in His word?, "*You have commanded us to keep Your statutes diligently.*" We acknowledge, Lord, our obligation; but we feel our impotency. Lord, help us: we look unto You. "*Oh that our ways were directed to*

*keep Your statutes!*" "Give what You command—and then command what You will." (Augustine.)

Now, as if to exhibit the fullness and suitableness of the promises of the gospel, the commands and prayers are returned back again from heaven with promises of quickening and directing grace. Thus does the Lord fully answer His end with us. He did not issue the commands, expecting that we could turn our own hearts to them; but that the conviction of our entire helplessness might cast us upon Him, who loves to be sought, and never will be thus sought in vain. And indeed this is a part of the "mystery of godliness," that in proportion as we depend upon Him who is alike, "the Lord our righteousness," and our strength; our desire after holiness will increase, and our prayers become more fervent. He who commands our duty, perfectly knows our weakness; and he who feels his own weakness is fully encouraged to depend upon the power of his Savior.

Faith is then the principle of evangelical obedience, and the promises of His grace enable us for duty, at the very time that we are commanded to it. In this view are brought together the supreme authority of the Lawgiver, the total insufficiency of the creature, the full provisions of the Savior, and the all-sufficiency of "the God of grace." We pray for what we lack; we are thankful for what we have; we trust for what is promised. Thus "all is of God." Christ "is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Thus "grace reigns" triumphant. The foundation is laid in grace, and the headstone will be brought forth with shoutings, crying, "Grace, grace unto it!" The Savior's work is finished, and Jesus is crowned Lord of all forever.

#### **6. *Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Your commandments.***

The Lord expects our obedience to be not only "*diligent*," but universal. Willingly to dispense with the least of the *commandments*, proves that we have yet to learn the spirit of acceptable obedience. Grace is given and suited for all, no less than for one of them, "that we might walk worthy of the Lord *unto all pleasing*." One lust "regarded in the heart" is sufficient to keep possession for the tyrant, however others may be restrained. Even Herod could "do many things;" and yet his adulterous wife cherished in his bosom, too plainly proved the sovereignty of sin to be undisturbed. Saul slew all the Amalekites *but one*; and that single exception to universal obedience marked his unsoundness, cost him the loss of his throne, and brought him under the awful displeasure of his God. And thus the one corrupt unmortified member brings the whole body to hell. Reserves are the canker upon godly sincerity. A secret indulgence, "the rolling of the sweet morsel under the tongue," "the part of the price kept back"—stamps our service as a robbery, not as an offering. We may be free, sincere, and earnest in many parts of our prescribed duty; but this "root of bitterness" renders the whole an abomination.

Sincerity therefore must be the stamp of my Christian profession. Though utterly unable to render perfect obedience to the least of the commandments, yet my desire and purpose will *have respect unto them all*. I shall no more venture to break the least, than the greatest of them; much less shall I ever think of attempting to atone for the breach of one by the performance of the rest. They are indeed many commandments; yet—like links in a chain—they form but one law; and I know who has said, "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

However the professor may confine his regard to the second table (as if the first were ceremonial, or obsolete, or the regulation of the outward man was the utmost extent of the requirement,) I would fix my eye with equal regard to both; yet specially marking any command in either of them; that may appear most directly opposed to my besetting corruptions. Thus "walking in the fear of the Lord," I may hope to walk "in the comfort of the Holy Spirit" and "hereby shall I know that I am of the truth, and shall assure my heart before God."

But where, in my strictest walk, is my hope of acceptance, but in Him, whose obedience has "fulfilled all righteousness" in my stead, and whose death "has redeemed me from the curse" of my unrighteousness, when repentance, prayers, and tears, would have been of no avail? Yet it is only in the path of holiness that we can realize our acceptance. The heart occupied with this world's pleasure knows nothing of this heavenly joy. Its brightness is dimmed—its freshness fades—its life withers—in the very breath of an unholy world. A godly assurance of the present favor of God must be weakened by self-indulgence, unwatchfulness, allowance of secret sins, or neglect of secret duties. "If you return to the Almighty"—said a wise man, "you shall be built up, *you shall put away iniquity* far from yourself. *Then* shall you have your delight in the Almighty, and *shall lift up your face* unto God."

Let us then carefully examine the character of our assurance. Does it rest simply and exclusively upon the testimony of the Gospel? Will it abide the test of the word of God? Is it productive of tenderness of conscience, watchfulness, and circumspection of conduct? Does it exercise our diligence in adding grace to grace, that we may "make our calling and election sure," and that "an entrance may be ministered to us *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?" How boldly can we plead our Christian confidence in the path of godliness, "*I have stuck to Your testimonies; O Lord, put me not to shame. Let my heart be sound in Your statutes, that I be not ashamed.*"

***7. I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned Your righteous judgments.***

*The righteous judgments of God* include the whole revelation of His word—so

called—as the rule by which He judges our present state, and will pronounce our final sentence. David's attainments here seemed to be as nothing. So much remained unlearned and unknown, that he could only anticipate the time, *when he shall have learned* them. "*Your commandment*"—he exclaims, "is *exceedingly broad*." When the Apostle, after twenty years' acquaintance with the gospel, expressed it as the one desire of his heart, "That I may know Christ;" evidently he entertained the same humbling views of his high attainments, and the same exalted apprehensions of the value of treasures yet unexplored, and progressively opening before him. Thus the wisest saints are only students in the Divine School. Yet whatever their *learning* be, it casts them into the mold and spirit of their doctrine. Conceit of one's knowledge, is the greatest enemy to knowledge, and the strongest proof of ignorance; so that, "if any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know." "He deceives himself."

But what is the motive, that enlivens the believer in this holy *learning*? Is it that he may live upon the airy breath of human applause? No, rather that he may "*praise his God with uprightness of heart*." When our mind is dark, our lips are sealed. But when "He opens our understandings" to "*learn His judgments*," He will next "open our lips, and our mouth shall show forth His praise." And this indeed is the end for which "His people are formed;" for which they "are called out of darkness into marvelous light." This is the daily frame, in which our God will be glorified. Yet must we live as well as sing His praise. "*The praise of the upright heart* will be shown in the holy walk and conversation."

But let us watch, that our *praise* really flows "out of the abundance" of what our hearts have "*learned*" of His "*righteous judgments*." For do we not sometimes speak of our Savior with a secret lurking after self-exaltation? May we not really be seeking and serving ourselves in the very act of seeming to serve and honor Him? Surely the very thought of the selfishness that defiles our holiest earthly praise, may well quicken our longings after that world of praise, where the flame burns active, bright, incessant; where we shall offer our sacrifices without defilement, without intermission, without weariness, without end!

### **8. *I will keep Your statutes: O forsake me not utterly.***

The resolution to "*keep the Lord's statutes*" is the natural result of having "*learned His righteous judgments*." But how happily does David combine "simplicity" of dependence with "godly sincerity" of obedience! Firm in his purpose, but distrustful of his strength, instantly upon forming his resolution, he recollects that the performance is beyond his power; and therefore the next moment, and almost the same moment, he follows it up with prayer, "*I will keep Your statutes: O forsake me not utterly*." Oh! beware of self-confidence in the Christian course. We stumble or advance, as we lean upon an arm of flesh, or upon an Almighty Savior.



Temporary desertion may be the seasonable chastisement of spiritual wantonness. When grace has been given in answer to prayer, it was not duly prized, or diligently improved. The "Beloved"—in answer to solicitation, "has come into His garden," He knocks at the door, but the spouse is "asleep." The answer to prayer was not expected, not waited for, and therefore not enjoyed; and the sleeper awakes too late, and finds herself forsaken by the object of her desire. Again—when we have given place to temptation; when love for our Savior "waxes cold," and our earnestness in seeking Him is fainting; we must not be surprised, if we are left for a time to the trial of a deserted state.

Yet we sometimes speak of the hidings of God's countenance, as if it were a sovereign act, calling for implicit submission; when the cause should at least be sought for, and will generally be found, in some "secret thing" of indulgence, unwatchfulness, or self-dependence. It was while David "kept silence" from the language of contrition, that he felt the pressure of the heavy hand of his frowning God. And may not the darkness, which has sometimes clouded our path, be the voice of our God, "Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backslidings shall reprove you; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that you have forsaken the Lord your God."

But in the engagement of the Lord's everlasting covenant, how clear is the warrant of faith!—how ample the encouragement for prayer, "*Forsake me not utterly!*" David knew and wrote of the Lord's unchangeable faithfulness to His people; and while he dreaded even a temporary separation from his God more than any worldly affliction, he could plead that gracious declaration, "Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor permit my faithfulness to fail."

We would not indeed make the promises of grace an encouragement to carelessness: yet it is indispensable to our spiritual establishment that we receive them in their full, free, and sovereign declaration. How many fainting souls have been refreshed by the assurances, "For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you: with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer!" "My sheep shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." In a lowly, self-abased, and dependent spirit, we shall best, however, learn to "make our boast in the Lord;" "confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in us, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." And even if awhile destitute of sensible consolation, still our language will be, "I will wait upon the Lord, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; and I will look for Him."

Great, indeed, is the danger and evil to the soul, if we apprehend the Lord to have forsaken us, because we are in darkness; or that we are out of the way, because we are in perplexity. These are the very hand-posts, that show us that we are in the way of His own promised leading—painful exercise—faithful

keeping—eternal salvation: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, *and not forsake them.*" Oh! the rest—the satisfaction of placing an implicit confidence in a covenant-keeping God!

*Forsaken* we may be—but not *utterly*. David was *forsaken*, not like Saul. Peter was *forsaken*, not like Judas, *utterly* and forever. What foreboding have you of such desertion? Is your heart willing to forsake Him? Have you no mournings and thirstings for His return? "If, indeed, you forsake Him, He will *forsake* you." But can you forsake Him? 'Let Him do as seems good to Him (is the language of your heart); I will wait for Him, follow after Him, cleave to His word, cling to His cross.' Mark His dealings with you. Inquire into their reason. Submit to His dispensation. If He *forsakes*, beg His return: but trust your *forsaking* God. "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him." Though my comfort is clouded, my hope remains unchanging, unchangeable—such as I would not resign for the glory of an earthly kingdom. What are these earnest breathings—this abiding confidence, but His own work in us? And can the Lord "forsake the work of His own hands?" Sooner should heaven and earth pass, than the faithful engagements of the gospel be thus broken.

**9. *How shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Your word.***

Why is the young man so especially called to *cleanse* his way? Because God justly claims the first and the best. And is it not a most affecting proof of the alienation of the heart from God, that the youth of man—the bloom and freshness of his mind, "his first love"—should naturally be devoted to the service of sin? Ever since fallen man "begat a son in his own likeness," "the imagination of man's heart has been evil from his youth." For "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" And never does the heart utter the cry, "My Father! You are the guide of my youth," until the misery of wandering without a guide has been painfully felt. And even when Divine grace has awakened the desire to return homewards, the habit of wandering from God, and the long-cherished pollutions of sin, seem to form an almost invincible barrier to progress.

The fearful power of "youthful lusts," and the madness with which the heart is hurried into forbidden indulgences, give solemn weight to the inquiry, "*How shall a young man cleanse his way?*" And the answer is ready. Let him "*take heed thereto according to Your word.*" Thus did Joseph, and Daniel with his young companions, "*cleanse their way*" in the defilement of an heathen atmosphere. It was probably the recollection of this purifying efficacy of the word, that induced the venerable Beza to mention in his will, among his chief matters of thankfulness to God—the mercy of having been called to the knowledge of the truth at the age of sixteen; thus, during a course of more than seventy years' walk

with God, "escaping the pollutions of the world through lust." But the "*way can only be cleansed*" by the cleansing of the heart; for how can a corrupt fountain "send forth" other than "bitter waters?" "Out of the heart are the issues of life." Hence the urgent need to cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

How precious, therefore, is *the word of God*, as the means of this cleansing operation! When our Savior had been setting forth Himself as "the way, the truth, and the life," and exhibiting the high privilege of union with Himself, "Now," He adds, "*you are clean, through the word which I have spoken unto you.*" This is "the truth," which He pleaded with His Father as the means of our sanctification. This sets out our purifying hope. Here are the promises, by which we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Thus is restored to man that golden "crown"—the stamp of his Maker's holiness—which "fell from his head when he sinned."

But oh! how does the recollection force itself upon us, that our way needs daily *cleansing!* so defiled are our actions, our thoughts, our motives—no more, our prayers and services. Let us then "*take heed according to the word of God*"—specially thankful for its heavenly light, which guides us to the "Fountain, that is opened for sin and for uncleanness." Let us also, under the same Divine light, seek for the daily sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God. "*Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.*" "*Cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit.*" (Prayer-Book.)

#### **10. *With my whole heart have I sought You; O let me not wander from Your commandments.***

Attention to the word, however important, can never be practically effective without earnest prayer. Indeed this is the character of the Lord's people, "a generation of *seekers;*" and yet how much do we lose of the comfort of our religion, and obscure the glory of our profession, by neglecting to bring "*our whole heart*" to this work! When sin is vigorous, and our spiritual affections are dull, and various hindrances combine in prayer—at this crisis strong faith is needed to overcome and to persevere. But here the soul too commonly yields to the difficulty, and contents itself either with heartless complainings, or with just sufficient exertion to quiet the voice of conscience, and produce a delusive peace within. But the Lord will not be found thus. His promise is not to such seekers as these; and if we are satisfied with this state, we must look for a very scanty measure of spiritual success, accompanied with the total absence of spiritual enjoyment.

In a far different spirit David could appeal, "*With my whole heart have I sought You.*" And this assurance, instead of producing self-confidence, will, so far as it is genuine, invariably show itself in a prayerful acknowledgment of our weakness,

*"O let me not wander from Your commandments."* Yet the feeblest desire and attempt to seek the Lord is the Spirit's rising beam in the heart, a "day of small things" not to be "despised." It is distinguished from every other principle by the simplicity of its object, "This one thing I do. One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after." My God! my Savior! *with my whole heart have I sought You.* "The desire of my soul is to Your name, and to the remembrance of You. With my soul have I desired You in the night; yes, with my spirit within me will I seek You early."

When the soul is thus conscious of "following the Lord fully," there is a peculiar *dread of wandering*. In a careless or half-hearted state, wanderings are not watched, so long as they do not lead to any open declension. Secret prayer will be hurried over, worldly thoughts unresisted, waste of time in frivolous pursuits indulged, without much concern. Not so, when the heart is *fully* in pursuit of its object. There is a carefulness, lest wandering thoughts should become habitual. There is a resistance of the first step, that might lead into a devious path. The soul remembers the "wormwood and the gall," "the roaring lion," and the devouring wolf; and in the recollection of the misery of its former wandering, dreads any departure from the Shepherd's fold.

This blessed state of mind the flock of Christ should cherish with godly jealousy. Yet let it be remembered, that daily progress in the heavenly walk is not maintained by yesterday's grace. Humble and dependent prayer must fetch in a fresh supply continually, *"O let me not wander from Your commandments."* 'Lord, I feel my heart so prone to wander. My affections are often scattered to the ends of the earth. "Unite my heart to fear Your name." Concentrate every thought, every desire, in Yourself, as the one object of attraction.'

### **11. *Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You.***

What an aggregate of guilt and misery is comprehended in this short word "sin"! Sin is the greatest curse that ever entered the universe of God, and the parent of every other curse! Its guilt is aggravated beyond the conception of thought. Injury to a Superior—a Father—a Sovereign! Its power is misery wherever it extends—in the family—in the world. In eternity its power is unrestrained. Sometimes the death-bed scene casts a fearful gleam of light upon "the worm that never dies, and the fire that never shall be quenched." But experience alone, can develop its full-grown horrors.

How supremely important therefore is the object of our preservation from sin! and how wisely adapted are the means to the end! That *word*—which the man of God had just before mentioned as the guide to the *cleansing of the way*—he *hides within his heart*—not for concealment, but for security, that it may be ready for constant use. It is not therefore a mere acquaintance with *the word*, that will avail us. There must be a cordial assent—a sound digestion—a constant respect. It

must be to us the rule that we would not transgress—the treasure that we are afraid to lose.

Often indeed Satan shuts out its entrance. He "catches away that which was sown." Too often, again, it is "withered or choked" in the soil. But "the honest and good heart" *"hides it*, keeps it, and brings forth fruit with perseverance, unto perfection." Here it "dwells richly in all wisdom," the storehouse, as occasion requires; a principle of holiness; a covering from sin. In this view it is recommended by one who had well acquainted himself with its valuable uses: "My son, let them (the Divine precepts) not depart from your eyes; keep sound wisdom and discretion. So shall they be life to your soul, and grace to your neck. Then shall you walk in your way safely, and your foot shall not stumble." David also gives us the same experience: "By the word of Your lips I have kept myself from the paths of the destroyer." And it was probably this recollection, combined with a sense of continual danger, that suggested the prayer, "Order my steps in Your word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

The value of *the word* is inestimable, as our means of walking with God in the hurry, business, and temptation of the day. The **Psalms** furnish precious materials for spontaneous prayer; the **promises**, food for comfort; the **rules**, such light in perplexity; the instruction, such solid matter for godly conference—all operating for one end—a preservation from sin. Being from *the word*—a manifestation of the Savior's love—what a keeping of the heart! what a quickening motive! How seasonable in worldly temptation is the warning of *the word hidden* in the heart, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God!" So in the spiritual conflict, let this *word*, "Him who comes to Me, I will never cast out," be *hidden in the heart*—what a preservation is it against unbelief!

Take *the word* to the wavering believer, alarmed by ridicule or persecution, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." Fearing that he shall never hold out to the end; "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Trembling lest his sins should rise up to his condemnation, "The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanses from all sin." And then as to duties: Let his Savior's *word* rebuke his indolence and unwatchfulness, "What! could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." Hide in the heart the sorrowful story of His agony in the garden, and His death on the cross, that "sin may appear yet more exceedingly sinful."

But how is *the word* to gain entrance into hearts like ours? How shall it be "*hid*" in so unkindly a soil? No power of man surely can plant it there. The Holy Spirit's Almighty agency must be diligently sought; for in proportion as we are filled with His gracious influence shall we be armed, as was our Master, for the effectual resistance of our spiritual temptations.

Lastly, connected with this subject, mark *the Christian's character*, "In whose

heart is my law." His *security*, "None of his steps shall slide." His *happiness*, "O how I love Your law." His *victory*, "The word of God abides in him, and he has overcome the wicked one." All infallibly provided by the covenant promise, "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." Oh! let us not then shrink from a close contact with *the word*, though the cost may be the cutting off a right hand for the saving of the life. There is no better test of our security, than our willingness to come to the searching light of *the word*.

## **12. *Blessed are You, O Lord: teach me Your statutes.***

"Praise is lovely for the upright." It is at once their duty and their privilege. But what does highest exercise amount to, when placed on the ground of its own merit? We clothe our ideas with magnificence of language, and deck them out with all the richness of imagery; and perhaps we are pleased with our forms of praise. But what are they in His sight beyond the offering of a contemptible worm, spreading before its Maker its own mean and low notions of Divine Majesty? If a worm were to raise its head, and cry—'O sun! You are the source of light and heat to a widely-extended universe'—it would, in fact, render a higher praise to the sun, than we can ever give to our Maker. Between it and us there is some proportion—between us and God none. Yet, unworthy as the offering confessedly is, He will not despise it. No, more, instead of spurning it from His presence, He has revealed Himself as "inhabiting the praises of Israel;" thus intimating to us, that the service of praise is "set forth in His sight as incense;" and at the same time, that it should be the daily and unceasing exercise of one at his own home.

The true character of praise, however, depends entirely upon the state of the heart. In the contemplative philosopher it is only cheerless, barren admiration: in the believer it becomes a principle of comfort and encouragement. For, can he forget the revelation, which his God has given of Himself in the gospel of His dear Son; how it divests every attribute of its terrors, and shines before us in all the glory of His faithfulness and love? The ascription of praise, "*Blessed are You, O Lord,*" frames itself therefore into the prophet's song, "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger forever, because He delights in mercy."

Truly then He is "*blessed*" in Himself, and delights to communicate His blessedness to His people. Hence we are emboldened to ask for continual "*teaching in His statutes,*" in the truths which He has revealed, and the precepts which He has enjoined; that we may "be followers of Him, as dear children," and "walk with Him in love."

The practical influence, however, of Divine light, constitutes its peculiar privilege. Man's teaching puffs up—God's teaching humbles. Man's teaching may lead us into error as well as into truth—God's teaching is "the unction from the Holy One,

by which we know all things." Man's teaching may make us more learned—God's teaching makes us more holy. It persuades, while it enlightens. It draws the heart, inclines the will, and carries out the soul to Christ. The tried character of God encourages us to look for His teaching, "*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will He teach sinners in the way.*" Our warrant is especially confirmed in approaching Him as our covenant God, "*Lead me in Your truth, and teach me; for You are the God of my salvation. Teach me to do Your will: for You are my God.*"

Reader! do you desire to praise your God? Then learn to frequent the new and living way, "by which alone you can offer your sacrifice acceptably." And while engaged in this holy service, inquire, surrounded as you are with the means of instruction, what progress you are making in *His statutes*. Seek to have a deeper acquaintance with the character of God. Seek to be the vessels of honor and glory, into which He is pouring more and more continually, "until they be filled with all the fullness of God." Value the unspeakable blessing of Divine teaching, by which you learn to live the life, and begin the *blessedness of God*.

### **13. *With my lips have I declared all the judgments of Your mouth.***

We have seen the *word hid in the heart*: now we see it poured forth from *the lips*. The *Lord has taught us His statutes*; now we *declare these judgments of His mouth*. But who can *declare* them with unction and power, except those who are *taught of God*? Now we are introduced to the high and honorable privilege of becoming a witness for our Savior! Our opportunities of service are our talents, and we trade with a large increase; for "to everyone who has shall be given, and he shall have abundance." But, "our lips are our own"—is the proud language of the world. Blessed be God; "we know that we are not our own." Most gladly do we acknowledge, that He, who fashioned our lips, has the best claim to their service. And when He has added to the claim of creation the right of purchase, what further constraining can we need, to induce the consecration of all that we are, and all that we have, to His glory!

This is a family obligation—to *declare the judgments of God's mouth*. Thus did Abraham obtain a blessing for his children. Heavenly blessings are the gracious reward of thus honoring our God. This also is the material of our general conversation, fruitful in spiritual results. Thus did Andrew bring Peter, and the woman of Samaria her neighbors, to Jesus. What might we not do for our fellow-sinners, if our conversation with them was the overflowing of a heart full of love; guided by a single desire to glorify our Savior, and to edify His Church! Fearful, indeed, is the guilt of sinful silence; and those, who thus prove their unfaithfulness to God, may well tremble at His awful denunciations. And yet it is possible to be bold in speech for God, when in the closet, the family, or the world, our consciences justly convict us of insincerity: "You who teach another, do you not teach yourself?" Let us seek, therefore, to have our hearts "filled with the Spirit"; otherwise ours will be "the talk of the lips, which tends only to poverty."

This subject illustrates the *character* of the Lord's people, "The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of judgment;" *their resolution*, "My mouth shall show forth Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof;" *their prayer*, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise;" *their blessing*, "The lips of the righteous feed many. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life." The example of the Savior, here as everywhere, is our perfect and encouraging pattern: "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; Lo! I have not refrained My lips, O Lord, You know." In this spirit of their Master, the Apostles awed their persecutors into forbearance: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

How sinful is it to employ our lips for any but the Lord! Yet not less sinful is our reluctance to employ them for Him! Surely the day, when perhaps we have been fluent in worldly conversation, and yet have neglected our opportunities of speaking a word for Him, must be considered a lost day! Is there not much cause for watchfulness, prayer, and self-denial; lest our silence should deny Him, whom by every obligation we are bound to confess? If our inability to bear a testimony for our Lord is not painful to us, must we not suspect, if not the sincerity, at least the strength, of our attachment to His precious name? and we can do no better than retire into our closets with the prayer of contrition, "Enter not into judgment with Your servant, O Lord."

#### **14. *I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches.***

How natural is it to be speaking of that which is our delight! The man of God was always *declaring the Lord's judgments*, because they were his *rejoicing*. There is indeed a real joy in despising earthly joys. "How sweet"—said Augustine, referring to the period of his conversion, "was it in a moment to be free from those delightful vanities, to lose which had been my dread; to part with which was now my joy!" More satisfying is the believer's *rejoicing in the way of God*, than that of the miser in his untold riches. Here he may safely say to his soul, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease." And these are the only riches within the reach of all. If we are poor in this world, it is the Lord's providence. If we are poor in grace, it is our own fault. It is because we have despised our Lord's "counsel to buy from Him gold tried in the fire, that we may be rich." And what is this enriching portion?, "Things present or things to come;" something enjoyed, and much more expected: the mercies of eternity added to the blessings of time; the riches of both worlds—all assured to him by the covenant of grace "*in the way of the Lord's testimonies.*"

Is it not then most strange, that, with such treasure in possession and in prospect, the child of God should be so careless in increasing his store, and in confirming his own interest in it? But the *riches of God's testimonies* have this peculiar property, that they cease to rejoice the heart, when they are not



uppermost there. Have there not been times, when we have actually rejoiced in the accession of some worldly good, or the accomplishment of some worldly desire, more than in this heavenly treasure? What then do we count our *riches*? To thrive in grace, or in the world? To be rich towards God, or for our own indulgence?

But though we would *rejoice in the testimonies*, and would not, for all this world can afford, lose a verse or a letter of our Bibles, yet we cannot be satisfied with a general interest. Many texts—doctrinal, practical, or experimental—have been specially sealed by the Divine Spirit upon our hearts. This or that promise—yes, all the land of promise, as much as I can set my foot upon—is mine. From these precious *testimonies*, shall we not increase our little stock, until we have apprehended the full enjoyment of the whole; if indeed the fullness of that which is called "unsearchable" can ever be, in this life at least, completely enjoyed?

But it is not so much in the Lord's testimonies, as "*in the way of them*," that David rejoiced—the way to God, of which they testify; "the way of holiness," in which they lead—the narrow way of the cross—so contrary to our natural desires and inclinations, that none but the true sheep of Christ can ever enter, or continue in it. Who that walks in these ways will fail to find them, in duties no less than in privileges, "paths of pleasantness and peace?" Our happiness is not withered, but flourishing. "Thus says the Lord, Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls."

### **15. *I will meditate in Your precepts, and have respect to Your ways.***

Our *rejoicing in the testimonies of God* will naturally flow in a habitual *meditation in them*. The thoughts follow the affections. The carnal man can never be brought to this resolution. Having no spiritual taste, he has no ability for spiritual *meditation*. Indeed many sincere Christians, through remaining weakness and depravity, are too often reluctant to it. They are content with indolent reading: and, with scarcely a struggle or a trial, yield themselves up to the persuasion, that they are unable sufficiently to abstract their minds for this blessed employment. But let the trial prove the work. Perseverance will accomplish the victory over mental instability, and the spiritual difficulty will give way to prayer, "Lord! help me."

The fruitfulness of meditation will soon be manifest. Does it not "stir up the gift of God that is in us," and keep the energies of the heart in a wakeful posture of conflict and resistance? Besides this, meditation is the digestive faculty of the soul, which converts the word into real and proper nourishment: so that this revolving of a single verse in our minds is often better than the mere reading of whole chapters. "Your words were found, and *I ate them*; and Your word was to me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart." Thus the mind becomes the instrument

of faith and love—of joy and strength.

But this meditation not only includes the stated times of thought, but the train of holy thoughts, that pass through the mind during the busy hours of the day. This maintains a habitual flow of spiritual desires, and excites the flame of love within, until at length the Psalmist's resolution becomes the inwrought habit of our minds, "*I will meditate in Your precepts.*"

Can we lack a subject for meditation, if indeed the salvation of Jesus has been made known to our souls? While musing upon the glorious theme, does not "the fire burn" within, as if our hearts were touched with a live coal from the altar of God? Chide then, believer, your dull and sluggish spirit, that permits the precious manna to lie ungathered upon the ground, that is slow to entertain these heavenly thoughts, or rather that heavenly guest, whose peculiar office it is to "help our infirmities," and especially to "take of Christ's, and show it to us."

The exercise, however, of this, as of every other duty, may prove a barren form, that imparts neither pleasure nor profit. Let each of us then ask—"What distinct experimental benefit have I received from the word? Do I endeavor to read it with prayerful meditation, until I find my heart filled with it?"

But this communing with the word is not for contemplation, but for practice. By *meditating on God's precepts*, we learn to have respect unto His ways—carefully "pondering the path of our feet," that we "turn not aside." "*Your loving-kindness is before my eyes; and I have walked in Your truth.*" "My foot," says Job, "has held His steps; His ways have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

#### **16. *I will delight myself in Your statutes: I will not forget Your word.***

As *delight* quickens to *meditation*, so does the practical habit of *meditation* strengthen the principle of *delight*. In the enjoyment of this delight, the Christian (however small his attainments may be) would rather live and die, than in the pursuit, and even in the possession, of the most satisfying pleasures of a vain and empty world. But if it be a real "*delight in the Lord's statutes*," it will be universal—when they probe the secret lurking-places within, and draw out to the full light the hidden indulgences of a heart that is yet carnal; when they call for the entire crucifixion of every corrupt inclination, and the unreserved surrender of all to the self-denying service of our God. This spirit is very different from the *delight* of the hypocrite, which is rather to "know," than to do, the "ways of his God;" and, therefore, who is satisfied with outward conformity, with little or no desire to "understand the errors" of his heart, that he might be "cleansed from secret faults." The spring of our obedience will therefore prove its sincerity; and the reality of our love will be manifested by its fruitfulness and active

cheerfulness in our appointed sphere of duty.

We may also observe here an evidence of adoption. Obedience is not a burden, but a *delight*. The servant may *perform* the statutes of God; but it is only the son who "*delights in them*." But what—we may ask—is the spring of adoption? It is "the Spirit of the Son sent into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." It is because we are at peace with God through Jesus Christ; because the *statutes* are the message of reconciliation through Him, that they become delightful to those, who are partakers of this great salvation. "The spirit of adoption," therefore, as the principle of delight, is the spring of acceptable obedience in the Lord's service.

And surely those who are serving Him in this happy filial walk, are not likely to "*forget His word*." As the eye is continually turned to the object of its affection, so the eye of the soul, that has been fixed with *delight* on the ways of God, will be habitually resting upon them. As one of the wise heathens observed—"I never yet heard of a covetous old man, who had forgotten where he had buried his treasure." The reason is abundantly evident. His heart is in it. And this explains the forgetfulness of the ungodly or the formalist. They have no *delight in the statutes*. And who is not glad to *forget* what is distasteful? But if we "have tasted that the Lord is gracious"—if we have found a treasure "in the way of His testimonies"—we cannot *forget* the sweetness of the experience, or where to go to refresh ourselves with the repetition of it.

*Forgetfulness of the word* is, however, to the Christian, a source of continual complaint, and sometimes also of most distressing temptation. Not that there is always a real charge of guilt upon the conscience. For, as Thomas Boston somewhat quaintly observes—"Grace makes a good heart-memory, even where there is no good head-memory." But means must be used, and helps may be suggested. Watchfulness against the influence of the world is of the first importance. How much of the good seed is choked by the springing thorns! If our hearts are ever refreshed with spiritual delight, we should be as cautious of an uncalled-for advance into the world, as of exposing an invalid's susceptible frame to a damp or an unhealthy atmosphere. Whatever warmth has been kindled in spiritual duties, may be chilled by one moment's unwary rush into an unkindly climate.

We would also recommend increasing attention to the word, as the means of its preservation—the exercise of "faith," without which it will "not profit"—the active habit of love, bringing with it a more habitual interest in the statutes—all accompanied with unceasing prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, made the express subject of promise for this purpose. Under His heavenly teaching and recollection, what *delight* will be found *in the statutes*! what blessed remembrance of His word! And what a happy spirit is this *delight and remembrance of the word*—the affections glowing—the memory pondering—the presence and manifestation of truth keeping the heart in close communion with

God! "O Lord God, *keep this forever* in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and prepare their hearts unto You."

**17. Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live, and keep Your word.**

This prayer appears to have been much upon David's heart, and in its substance and object it is again repeated. Nor does he fail to acknowledge the answer to it. The believer, like David, is a man of large expectations. As regards himself—his own daily provocations and backslidings—he cannot stand upon his own ground. But when he brings with him the name, the blood, the intercession of Jesus; as soon could God deny His own beloved Son, as resist the supplication of those who present this all-prevailing plea. Not only so, but—is He not His own gift to His children, as the pledge of every other gift? And what other pledge can they need, to encourage them to draw near with the largest desire, and the most heavenly expectation? We may, indeed, be too bold in our manner of approach to God; but we cannot be too bold in our expectations from Him. Standing as we do upon such high and sure ground, it is equally dishonorable to Him, and impoverishing to ourselves, to ask only a little of Him. Rather let us, according to His own command, "open our mouths wide; and He will fill them." Rather let us expect that He will *deal*—not only favorably—but *bountifully with His servants*—that, as "our God, He will supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

And, indeed, the most experienced believer cannot forget, that he is in himself still the same poor, weak, empty, helpless creature as at first. Nothing, therefore, short of a *bountiful* supply can answer his continual neediness. And such a supply is always at hand. The act of prayer increases the power to pray. The throne of grace is a well, which no power or malice of the Philistines can stop up. We need not say, "We have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." Faith will enable us "with joy to draw out of this well of salvation." Let us bring our empty vessels, until "there is not a vessel more." Yes—believer—there is indeed a *bountiful* supply of grace—of every kind—suited to every need—grace to pardon—grace to quicken—grace to bless. Oh! see, then, that you come not empty away. Remember—who it is that pleads before the throne. Remember—that the grace you need is in His hand. From eternity He foreknew your case. He laid your portion by. He has kept it for the time of need; and now He only waits for an empty vessel, into which to pour His supply. He is ready to show you, how infinitely His grace exceeds all thoughts—all prayers—all desires—all praises.

And say—what has been the fruit of your pleading, waiting expectancy at "the throne of grace?" Have you not returned thence with a fresh spring of devotedness in His service, with every selfish thought forgotten in the desire, that you "*may live, and keep His word?*" Nothing touched or moved your reluctant heart, but the apprehension of *bountiful* redeeming love. This makes obedience easy—delightful—natural—in a manner unavoidable. It "constrains" to it. The

man now *lives*—not the animal life of appetite—not the sensual life of vanity and pleasure—but the only life that deserves the name. He lives singly, supremely "to Him who died for him, and rose again." He "*lives, and keeps His word.*" His motto and character now is, "To me to live is Christ." He values life only by his opportunities of serving his God. The first archangel knows not a higher object of existence. And how encouraging the reflection, that in this glorious object the lowest servant in the household of God is an equal participant with the most blessed inhabitant of heaven!

### **18. *Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law.***

In order *to keep God's word*, must we not pray to understand it? What then is the prayer? Not—give me a plainer Bible—but *open my eyes* to know my Bible. Not—show me some new revelations beside *the law*—but make me *behold the wonders of the law*. David had acquired in the Divine school "more understanding than all his teachers;" yet he ever comes to his God under a deep sense of his blindness. Indeed those who have been best and longest taught, are always the most ready to "sit at the feet of Jesus," as if they had everything to learn. It is an unspeakable mercy to know a little, and at the same time to feel that it is only a little. We shall then be longing to know more, and yet anxious to know nothing, except as we are taught of God.

There are indeed in *God's law* things so *wondrous*, that "the angels desire to look into them." The exhibition of the scheme of redemption is in itself a world of wonders. The display of justice exercised in the way of mercy, and of mercy glorified in the exercise of justice, is a wonder, that must fill the intelligent universe of God with everlasting astonishment. And yet these "*wondrous things*" are hidden from multitudes, who should be most deeply interested in the knowledge of them. They are "hidden," not only from the ignorant and unconcerned, but "from the wise and prudent; and revealed" only "to babes"—to those who practically acknowledge that important truth, that a man "can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." External knowledge is like the child spelling the letters without any apprehension of the meaning. It is like reading a large and clear print with a thick veil before our eyes. Oh! how needful then is the prayer—"Unveil"; "*Open my eyes:*" let the veil be taken away from the law, that I may understand it; and from my heart, that I may receive it!

But do not even Christians often find the word of God to be as a sealed book? They go through their accustomed portion, without gaining any increasing acquaintance with its light, life, and power, and without any distinct application of its contents to their hearts. And thus it must be, whenever reading has been unaccompanied with prayer for Divine influence. For we not only need to have *our "eyes opened to behold"* fresh wonders, but also to give a more spiritual and transforming perception of those wonders, which we have already beheld.

But are we conscious of our blindness? Then let us hear the counsel of our Lord, that we "anoint our eyes with eye-salve, that we may see." The recollection of the promises of Divine teaching is fraught with encouragement. The Spirit is freely and abundantly promised in this very character, as "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God." If, therefore, we desire a clearer insight into these "*wondrous things*" of revelation—if we would behold the glorious beauty of our Immanuel—if we would comprehend something more of the immeasurable extent of that love, with which "God so loved the world, as to give His only-begotten Son," and of that equally incomprehensible love, which moved that Son so cheerfully to undertake our cause—we must make daily, hourly use of this important petition, "*Open my eyes!*"

**19. *I am a stranger in the earth: hide not Your commandments from me.***

Such is the condition of the child of God—a *stranger in the earth!* This confession, however, from a solitary wanderer would have had little comparative meaning. But in the mouth of one, who was probably surrounded with every sort of worldly enjoyment, it shows at once the vanity of "earth's best joys," and the heavenly tendency of the religion of the Bible. This has been ever the character, confession, and glory of the Lord's people. We "would not live always;" and gladly do we hear the warning voice, that reminds us to "arise and depart, for this is not our rest." And was not this especially the character, not of David only, but of David's Lord? Born at an inn—"having nowhere to lay His head"—suffering hunger—subsisting upon alms—neglected by His own—He "looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for His comforters, but He found none"—might He not justly take up the confession, "I am a *stranger in the earth?*"

This verse exhibits the Christian in many most interesting points of view; distant from his proper home—without a fixed residence—with no particular interest in the world—and submitting to all the inconveniences of a *stranger* on his journey homewards. Such is his state!

And the word of God includes all that he needs—a guide, a guard, a companion—to direct, secure, and cheer his way. "When you go, it shall lead you; when you sleep, it shall keep you; and when you awake, it shall talk with you." Most suitable then is *the stranger's* prayer, "*hide not Your commandments from me.*" Acquaintance with the word of God supplies the place of friends and counselors. It furnishes light, joy, strength, food, armor, and whatever else he may need on his way homewards.

The pilgrim-spirit is the pulse of the soul. All of us are traveling to eternity. The worldling is at home *in the earth*—a pilgrim only by restraint. His heart would say, "It is good for me to be here. Let God dispose of heaven at His pleasure. I am content to have my "portion in this life." The child of God is a *stranger in the earth*. Heaven is the country of his birth. His kindred—his inheritance—his

Savior—his hope—his home—all is there. He is "a citizen of no insignificant city," of "the heavenly Jerusalem." He is therefore a pilgrim in affection, no less than in character. How cheering is the thought, that "here we have no continuing city," if in heart and soul we are "seeking one to come!"

We know, indeed, that we cannot—we would not—call this world our home, and that it is far better to be without it, than to have our portion in it. But do we never feel at home *in the earth*, thus forgetting our proper character, and our eternal prospects? Do we always live, speak, and act as "*strangers in the earth*;" in the midst of earthly enjoyments, sitting loose to them, as if our treasure was in heaven? Does our conversation in the society of the world savor of the home, where we profess to be going? Is the world gaining ascendancy in our affection? Let the cross of Calvary be the object of our daily contemplation—the ground of our constant "glorying;" and the world will then be to us as a "crucified" object.

And lastly, let us not forget, that we are looking forward, and making a progress towards a world, where none are strangers—where all are children of one family, dwelling in one eternal home. "*In our Father's house*," said our gracious Head, "*are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you.*"

## **20. *My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto Your judgments at all times.***

This intense desire and affection is the Christian's answer to his prayers—*Open my eyes—Hide not Your commandments from me*. For who that is conversant with this blessed revelation but *longs* to be filled with it? In contrasting this glow with the church of Laodicea, under a brighter dispensation, "neither cold nor hot" which state, we may ask, most nearly resembles our own? Observe also, not only the fervor, but the steady uniformity, of this religion. It was not a rapture, but a habit; constant and uniform; "*at all times.*" With us such enjoyments are too often favored seasons, happy moments; alas! only moments—why not days, and months, and years? The object of our desires is an inexhaustible spring. The *longing of the soul* can never over-reach its object. The *cherished desire*, therefore, will become the established habit—the element in which the child of God lives and thrives.

This uniformity is the most satisfactory test of our profession. Often are *the judgments* prized in affliction, when all other resources fail: or under a pang of conscience when the terror of the Lord is frowning upon the sinner. But the excitement wears off, and the heart returns to its hardness. Often also the impulse of novelty gives a strong but temporary impression. This is very different from the Christian, whose study is stretching out its desires *at all times*; finding the judgments a cordial or a discipline, a support or a preservation, as his need may require.

Not less important is this habit, as the test of the soul's prosperity. We are not satisfied with *occasional* fellowship with a beloved friend. His society is the life of our life. We seek him in his own ways, where he is accustomed to resort. We feel the blank of his absence. We look out for his return with joyous anticipation.

Now, is this the picture of *our soul's longing* for communion with Jesus? We may feel His loss, should the stated seasons of prayer fail in bringing Him near to us. But do we *long* for Him *at all times*? Do we "wait for Him in the way of *His judgments*," where He is usually found? And when spiritual exercises are necessarily exchanged for the occupations of the world, do we seize the leisure moment to catch a word—a glimpse—a look? Is not the heart silent with shame in the recollection of the cold habit of external or occasional duty?

But why this low ebbing of spiritual desire? Do we live near to the throne of grace? Have we not neglected prayer for the influence of the Spirit? Have we not indulged a light, vain, and worldly spirit, than which nothing more tends to wither the growth of vital religion? Or have not the workings of unbelief been too faintly resisted? This of itself will account for much of our dullness; since the rule of the kingdom of grace is, "According to your faith be it unto you." Grace is, indeed, an insatiable principle. Enjoyment, instead of satisfying, only serves to sharpen the appetite. Yet if we are content to live at a low rate, there will be no sensible interest in the consolation of the Gospel. We know, desire, and are satisfied with little; and, therefore, we enjoy but little. We live as borderers on the land, instead of bearing our testimony: "Surely it flows with milk and honey; *and this is the fruit of it.*" This is not the thriving, the cheerfulness, the adorning of the Gospel. It is rather the obscuring of the glory of our Christian profession, and of the happiness of its attendant privileges.

Let not the fervor of desire here expressed be conceived to be out of reach; nor let it be expected in the way of some sudden manifestation or excitement. Rather let us look for it in a patient, humble, and persevering waiting upon the Lord. We may have still to complain of coldness and wanderings. Yet strength to wait will be imperceptibly given: faith will be sustained for the conflict; and thus "our souls will make their boast in the Lord," even though an excited flow of enjoyment should be withheld. One desire will, however, tread upon another, increasing in fullness, as the grand object is nearer our grasp.

At all events, let us beware of resting satisfied with the confession of our lukewarmness to our fellow-creatures, without "pouring out our heart before the Lord." There is a fullness of grace in our glorious Head to "strengthen the things which remain, which are ready to die," as well as at the beginning to "quicken" us when "dead in trespasses and sins." Abundant, also—are the promises and encouragements to poor, dry, barren souls, "I will heal their backslidings; I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." For what purpose are promises such as these given, but that they may be "arguments," with which to "fill our mouth," when in the contrition of faith we



again venture to "order our cause before God?" And "will He plead against us with His great power?" No! but "He will put His strength in us;" and we shall yet again "run the way of His commandments" with an enlarged heart.

**21. *You have rebuked the proud that are cursed, which err from Your commandments.***

Let the histories of Cain, Pharaoh, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod, exhibit *the proud under the rebuke and curse of God*. He abhors their persons, and their offerings; He "knows them afar off," "He resists them;" "He scatters them in the imaginations of their hearts." Especially hateful are they in His sight, when cloaking themselves under a spiritual garb; "They say, Stand by yourself, come not near me; for I am holier than you. *These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burns all the day.*" Most of all, is this sin an abomination in His own beloved people. David and Hezekiah are instructive beacons in the church, that they, least of all, must expect to escape His rebuke, "You were a God who forgave them; *though You took vengeance on their inventions.*"

Now the people of the world call *the proud* happy. But will they be counted so, when they shall be manifestly under the *curse of God*; when "the day of the Lord shall be upon them to bring them low," yes, to "burn them in the oven" of "His wrath?"

Pride probably influences all, who "*err from the Lord's commandments*;" yet doubtless "the Righteous Judge" will make an infinite difference between *errors* of infirmity and obstinate wilfulness. The confession of the man of God, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep"—is widely different in character from the subjects of this awful *rebuke and curse*. "*You have trodden down all those who err from Your statutes; for their deceit is falsehood.*"

We wonder not at this expression of the mind of God concerning pride. There is no sin more abhorrent to His character. It is as if we were taking the crown from His head, and placing it upon our own. It is man making a God of himself—acting from himself, and for himself. Nor is this principle less destructive to our own happiness. And yet it is not only rooted, but it often rears its head and blossoms, and bears fruit, even in hearts which "hate and abhor" its influence. It is most like its father, the Devil, in serpentine deceitfulness. It is always active—always ready imperceptibly to mix itself up with everything. When it is mortified in one shape, it rises in another. When we have thought that it was gone, in some unexpected moment we find it here still. It can convert everything into nourishment, even God's choicest gifts—yes, the graces of His Spirit. Let no saint, therefore, however near he may be living to God, however favored with the shinings of His countenance—consider himself beyond the reach of this temptation. Paul was most in danger, when he seemed to be most out of it; and nothing but an instant miracle of grace and power saved him from the "snare of the Devil."

Indeed, the whole plan of salvation is intended to humble the pride of man, by exhibiting his restoration to the Divine favor, as a free gift through the atoning blood of the cross. How hateful, therefore, is *proud* man's resistance to this humbling doctrine of the cross, and the humbling requisitions of the life of faith flowing from it! This makes the sure "foundation" of the believer's hope, "a stone of stumbling" to the unbeliever's ruin. As regards also the means of salvation—how can pride lift up his head in the view of the Son of God, "taking upon Him the form of a servant," that He might bear the curse of man? "Behold, the soul that is lifted up, is not upright in him."

But can a sinner—can a saint—be *proud*?—one who owes everything to free and sovereign grace—one who has wasted so much time—abused so much mercy—so grieved the Spirit of God—who has a heart so full of atheism—unbelief—selfishness? No, the very pride itself should be the matter of the deepest daily humiliation. Thus the remembrance of it may, under Divine grace, prove an effectual means of subduing it in our hearts. We shall overcome corruption by its own working, and meet our adversary with his own weapons. And if this cursed principle be not wholly destroyed, yet the very sight of its corruption, deepening our contrition, will be overruled for our spiritual advancement.

O blessed end intended by the Lord's dealings with us! to "humble and to prove us" "to know," and to make us know "what was in our heart, that He might do us good at the latter end!" Let us not frustrate His gracious intentions, or build again the things which He would have destroyed. May we love to lie low—lower than ever—infinity low before Him! Lord! teach us to remember, that "that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in Your sight." Teach us to bless You, for even Your sharp and painful discipline which tends to subjugate this hateful pride of our hearts before our Savior's cross!

## ***22. Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept Your testimonies.***

The *proud under the rebuke of God* are usually distinguished by their enmity to His people. They delight to pour upon them "*reproach and contempt*," with no other provocation given, than that their *keeping the testimonies* of God condemns their own neglect. This must, however, be counted as the cost of a decided, separate, and consistent profession. Yet it is such a portion as Moses valued above all the treasures of the world; yet it is that *reproach*, which our Master Himself "despised," as "reckoning it not worthy to be compared with "the joy that was set before Him." For did He bear His cross only on the way to Calvary? It was laid for every step in His path; it met Him in every form of suffering, of "*reproach and contempt*." Look then at Him, as taking up His daily cross in breathing the atmosphere of a world of sin, and "enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself." Mark Him consummating His course of

*"reproach and contempt,"* by suffering "outside the gate;" and can we hesitate to "go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach?"

The trial, however—especially if cast upon us by those whom we have loved and valued, or by those whom we wish to love and value us—proves most severe; and the spreading our case, after David's example, before the Lord, is the only preservation from faintness, *"Remove from me reproach and contempt."*

Perhaps *"contempt"* is more hard to bear than *"reproach."* Even our enemies think of us so much better than we deserve, that it strikes with peculiar poignancy. Yet when the submissive prayer of deprecation is sent us; doubtless some answer—and *that* the right answer—will be given; and whether the *"reproach"* be removed, or "grace" given "sufficient" to endure it, the outcome will prove alike for the glory of God, and the prosperity of our own souls.

But let us beware of that "way of escape" in returning to the world, which the insincere are ever ready to pursue. They dare not act according to the full conviction of their consciences: they dare not confront their friends with the avowal of their full determination to form their conduct by the principles of the word of God. This is hard—this is impossible. They know not the "victory which overcomes the world", and, therefore, cannot bear the mark upon their foreheads, "These are those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes." Far better, however, will be the heaviest weight of *"reproach and contempt,"* than any such endeavor to remove it from ourselves.

The desire to escape the cross convicts the heart of unfaithfulness, and makes way for tenfold difficulties in our path. Every worldly compliance against the voice of God is a step into the by-path, which deviates wider and wider from the strait and narrow way, brings discredit upon our professions, proves a stumbling-block in the way of the weak, and will cause us, if not actually to come short, at least to *"seem to come short,"* of the promised rest."

But is the weight of the cross really "above what we are able to bear?" He who bore it for us will surely enable us to endure it for Him, and, upheld by Him, we cannot sink. It is a sweet exchange, by which the burden of sin is removed, and bound to His cross; and what remains to us is the lighter cross of *"reproach and contempt,"*—the badge of our discipleship. If, then, we have the testimony of our consciences, that in the midst of the persecuting world we *"have kept His testimonies,"* here is our evidence of adoption, of our Father's special love, of the indwelling, comforting, supporting Spirit. Here, then, is our warrant of hope, that the overwhelming weight will be *removed from us;* and that we shall be able to testify to our Master's praise in the Churches of God, that "His yoke is easy, and His burden is light."

**23. Princes also did sit and speak against me; but Your servant did**

### ***meditate in Your statutes.***

David might well give his testimony to "the words of the Lord," that they were "tried words," for perhaps no one had ever tried them more than himself, and certainly no one had more experience of their faithfulness, sweetness, and support. Saul and his "*princes might indeed sit and speak against him;*" but he had a resource, of which they could never deprive him, "Not as the world gives, give I unto you." As our blessed Master was employed in communion with His Father, and delighting in His work at the time when the "*princes did sit and speak against him;*" so, under similar circumstances of trial, this faithful servant of God, by *meditation in the Lord's statutes*, extracted spiritual food for his support; and in this strength of his God he was enabled to "suffer according to His will, and to commit the keeping of his soul to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

The children of Israel in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and the disciples of Christ in the early ages of the Church, have each found "this same affliction to be accomplished in themselves." that God is pleased to permit it, to show "that his kingdom is not of this world," to wean His people from earthly dependencies, and to bring out before the world a more full testimony of His name.

One other reason is suggested by this verse—to make His word more precious by the experience of its sustaining consolation in the conflict with the power of the world. Often, indeed, from a lack of a present application of the word—young Christians especially are in danger of being put to rebuke by the scorner's sneer. The habit of scriptural *meditation* will realize to them a present God, speaking "words of spirit and life" to their souls. The importance, therefore, of an accurate and well-digested acquaintance with this precious book cannot be too highly estimated. In the Christian's conflict it is "the sword of the Spirit," which, if it be kept bright by constant use, will never be wielded without the victory of faith. Such powerful support does it give against fainting under persecution, that the good soldier may ever be ready to thank God, and to take courage. Christ has left it, indeed, as the portion of His people, "In the world you shall have tribulation;" counterbalanced, however, most abundantly, by the portion which they enjoy in Him, "In Me you shall have peace." If, therefore, the one-half of this portion may seem hard, the whole legacy is such as no servant of Christ can refuse to accept, or indeed will receive without thankfulness.

### ***24. Your testimonies also are my delight, and my counselors.***

What could we want more in a time of difficulty than comfort and direction? David had both these blessings. As the fruit of his "*meditation in the Lord's statutes,*" in his distress they were his "*delight;*" in his perplexity they were his "*counselors.*" He would not have exchanged his *delight* for the best joys of earth. And so wisely did his counselors direct his course, that, though "*princes sat and spoke against him,*" they "could find no occasion nor fault." The testimonies of God were truly

his "*counselors*." He guided his own conduct by the rules laid before him in the book of God, as if he were having recourse to the most experienced counselors, or rather as if the prophets of his God were giving the word from His mouth. Thus the subject as well as the sovereign, had his counsel. On one side was Saul and his counselors—on the other side, David and the *testimonies of his God*. Which was better furnished with that "wisdom which is profitable to direct?" Subsequently as a king, David was constrained to make "*the testimonies of his God his counselors*"; and, probably, to his constant regard to their voice he owed much of his earthly prosperity.

In such a dark world as this, beset with temptation at every turn, we preeminently need sound and wise counsel. But all of us carry an evil *counselor* within us, and it is our folly to listen to his voice. God has given us His word as a sure counselor, and "he who hearkens to its counsel is wise."

Now, do we value the privilege of this heavenly counsel? Every improvement must increase our *delight* in it; a heartless interest shuts out this blessing. But those who make *the word their delight* will always find it *their counselor*. Yet a mere cursory reading will never realize to us its holy delight or counsel. It must be brought home to our own experience, and consulted on those trivial occasions of every day, when, unconscious of our need of Divine direction, we are too often inclined to lean to our own counsel. The Christian is a man of faith, every step of his way. And this habitual use and daily familiarity with the testimonies of God will show him the pillar and the cloud, in all the dark turns of his heavenly road. The word will be to him as the "Urim and Thummin"—an infallible *counselor*.

Sometimes, however, perplexity arises from the conflict, not between conscience and sinful indulgence (in which case Christian sincerity would always determine the path), but between duty and duty. When, however, acknowledged obligations seem to interfere with each other, the counsel of the word will mark their relative importance, connection, and dependence: the present path in providence: the guidance which has been given to the Lord's people in similar emergencies; and the light which the daily life of our Great Exemplar exhibits before us.

The great concern, however, is to cultivate the habit of mind, which falls in most naturally with the counsel of the word. "Walking in the fear of the Lord," in a simple spirit of dependence, and torn away from the idolatry of taking counsel from our own hearts, we cannot *materially* err; because there is *here a suitableness between the disposition and the promise*—a watchfulness against the impetuous bias of the flesh; a paramount regard to the glory of God, and a meek submission to His gracious appointment. If the counsel, however, should prove fallible, the fault is not in the word, but in the indistinctness of our own perception. We need not a clearer rule, or a surer guide, but a more single eye. And if, after all, it may not mark every precise act of duty (for to do this, even all the world "could not contain the books that should be written"), yet it determines the standard to which the most minute acting of the mind should be brought; and

the disposition, which will reflect the light of the will of God upon our path.

But let it be remembered, that any lack of sincerity in the heart—any allowance of self-dependence, will always close the avenues of this Divine light and counsel. We are often unconsciously "walking in the light of our own fire, and in the sparks that we have kindled." Perhaps we sought, as we conceived, the guidance of the Lord's counsel, and supposed that we were walking in it. But, in the act of seeking, and as the preparation for seeking, did we subject our motives and inclinations to a strict, cautious, self-suspecting scrutiny? Was the heart schooled to the discipline of the cross? Was "every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ?" Or was not our heart possessed with the object, before counsel was sought at the mouth of God? Oh! how careful should we be to walk warily in those uncertain marks of heavenly counsel, that fall in with the bias of our own inclination! How many false steps in the record of past experience may be traced to the counsel of our own hearts, sought and followed to the neglect and counsel of God; while no circumstance of perplexity can befall us in the spirit of humility, simplicity, and sanctity, when the counsel of the Lord will fail!

An undue dependence upon human counsel, whether of the living or the dead, greatly hinders the full influence of the counsel of the word. However valuable such counsel may be, and however closely it may agree with the word, we must not forget, that it is not the word—that it is fallible, and therefore must never be resorted to in the first place, or followed with that full reliance, which we are warranted to place on the revelation of God.

On the other hand, what is it to have God's word as our "*Counselor*?" Is it not to have Himself, "the only wise God?" When our Bibles, in seasons of difficulty, are searched in a humble, prayerful, teachable spirit, we are as much depending upon the Lord Himself for counsel, as if we were listening to an immediate revelation from heaven. We need not a new revelation, or a sensible voice from above, for every fresh emergency. It is enough, that our Father has given us this blessed "word as a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path."

Let me then inquire—What is the counsel of God, that speaks directly to myself? If I am an unawakened sinner, it warns me to turn from sin; it invites me to the Savior; it directs me to wait upon God. If I am a professor, slumbering in the form of godliness, it shows me my real condition; it instructs me in the all-sufficiency of Christ, and cautions me of the danger of hypocrisy. If through grace I am made a child of God, still do I need my Father's counsel to recover me from perpetual backsliding, to excite me to increased watchfulness, and to strengthen my confidence in the fullness of His grace, and the faithfulness of His love. Ever shall I have reason for the grateful acknowledgment, "I will bless the Lord, who has given me counsel." And every step of my way would I advance, glorifying my God and Father by confiding in His counsel unto the end: "You shall guide me with Your counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."

**25. *My soul cleaves to the dust; quicken me according to Your word.***

Sin is no trifle to a child of God. It is his heaviest sorrow. Thus David—thus the Great Apostle found it. And where is the believer who has not full sympathy with their complaints? To have a *soul cleaving to the dust*, and not to feel the trouble, is the black mark of a sinner, dead in sins—dead to God. To "know the plague of our own heart," to feel our misery, to believe and to apply the remedy, is the satisfactory evidence of a child of God. *Dust* is the portion of the world, and they wish for no better. But that the soul of the man of God should continually *cleave to the dust*, is most strange and humbling. And yet such is the influence of his evil nature—such the power of self-will and self-indulgence—such the regard to human praise, and cherishing of self-admiration, that were it not that he "abhors himself" for the very *dust that cleaves* to him, he would question the existence of a renewing change. He knows what he ought to be. He has tasted the blessedness of "mounting upward on eagles' wings." But every attempt to rise is hindered by the clogging weight that keeps him down.

It is, however, the cleaving of his soul that is so painful—not occasional, but constant—not like the bird of the morning that descends for a moment, and then soars his upward flight; but it seems as if, like the "serpent—dust was to be his food;" as if the spiritual, heaven-born soul was to sink and grovel below. And then, as the dust of the summer-road blinds the eye, and obscures the view—how does this earthliness of soul darken the view of the Savior, dim the eye of faith, and hide the glorious prospects which, when beheld in the clear horizon, enliven the weary pilgrim on his way!

But this complaint is the language of conflict and humiliation—not of despondency. Observe the believer carrying it to the Lord—"Here I lie in the *dust*, without life or power. Oh! Savior, who "came that I might have life, and that I might have it more abundantly"—*Quicken me*: Breathe into me Your own life, that I may rise from the *dust*, and *cleave* to You.' This cry for quickening grace is the exercise of faith. We have a covenant to plead. Faith is the hand that takes hold of the promise, "*according to Your word.*" Can this word fail? "Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or one tittle pass" from the engagements of a covenant-keeping God. "He is faithful who promised." The man who takes hold of this plea, is "a Prince who has power with God, and prevails."

But how different is the character of the mere professor! ready probably to make the same confession, yet without humiliation, without prayer, without faith. Nothing is more common than to hear the complaint—"My soul cleaves to the dust." The world has such power over us—we are so cold—so dead to spiritual things: while, perhaps, the complaint is never once brought with wrestling supplication, but rather urged in indolent self-delight, as an evidence of the good state of the heart before God.

Yet it is not the complaint of sickness, but an application to the physician, which advances the recovery of the patient. We do not usually expect to better our condition, by mourning over its badness, or merely wishing for its improvement. Nor is it the confession of sin, but the application to the Great Physician, that marks genuine contrition before God. That confession which evaporates in heartless complaints, belongs not to the tenderness of a renewed heart. But the utterance of genuine prayer is the voice of God's own "Spirit making intercession for us;" and then, indeed, how cheering the encouragement, that He "who searches the hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God!"

Some are ready to give up or delay their duty, when they have been unable to bring their heart to it. Thus does "Satan get advantage of us" by our "ignorance of his devices." *Quickening* grace is not the ground or warrant for duty. Indisposition to duty is not our weakness, but our sin—not therefore to be indulged, but resisted. We must mourn over the dullness which hinders us, and diligently wait for the 'help we every moment need.' God keeps the grace in His own hands, and gives it at His pleasure, to exercise our daily dependence upon Him. The acting of grace strengthens the habit. Praying helps to pray. If the door is closed, "Knock, and it shall be opened." Assuredly it will not long be shut to him, who has faith and patience to wait until it be opened.

Now let me sift the character of my profession. Is it a habitual, persevering, overcoming conflict with sin? Do I not sometimes indulge in fruitless bemoanings of my state, when I had far better be exercising myself in vigorous actings of grace? If I find "*my soul cleaving to the dust,*" am I not sometimes "lying on my face," when I ought to be "taking heaven by violence," by importunate petitions for *quickening* grace? Are my prayers invigorated by confidence in the word of God? Oh! let me remember that "those who wait upon the Lord" shall shake off *the dust* to which they have *cleaved* so long, and "shall mount with wings like eagles," to take possession of their heavenly home.

O Lord, make me more deeply ashamed, that "*my soul should cleave to the dust.*" Breathe upon me fresh influence from Your *quickening* Spirit. Help me to plead Your word of promise; and oh! may every fresh view of my sinfulness, while it prostrates me in self-abasement before You, be overruled to make the Savior daily and hourly more precious to my soul. For defiled as I am in myself, in every service of my heart, what but the unceasing application of His blood, and the uninterrupted prevalence of His intercession, give me a moment's confidence before You, or prevent the very sins that mingle with my prayers from sealing my condemnation? Blessed Savior! it is nothing but Your everlasting merit, covering my person, and honoring my sacrifice, which satisfies the justice of an offended God, and restrains it from breaking forth as a devouring fire—to consume me upon my very knees.



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