

Exposition of Psalm 119

Verses 26-50

By [Charles Bridges](#)

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26. *I have declared my ways, and You heard me; teach me Your statutes.*

A beautiful description of the "simplicity and godly sincerity" of the believer's "walk with God!" He spreads his whole case before his God, "*declaring his ways*" of sinfulness, of difficulty, and of conduct. And, indeed, it is our privilege to acquaint our Father with all our care and need, that we may be pitied by His love, and guided by His counsel, and confirmed by His strength. Who would not find relief by unbosoming himself to his Father? This showing of ourselves to God—*declaring our ways* of sin before Him without deceit—is the short and sure way of rest.

"You heard me." "*When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*" While the voice of ingenuous confession was suppressed, cries and lamentations were disregarded. It was not the voice of the penitent child; and, therefore, "where was the sounding of his father's affections, and of his mercies towards him?" But now, on the first utterance of confession from his lips, or rather on the first purpose of contrition formed in his heart; "while he is yet speaking," the full and free pardon, which had been signed in heaven, comes down with royal parental love to his soul, "I said, I will confess my transgression to the Lord; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

Oh! what cannot he testify of the more than parental tenderness, with which "his transgression is forgiven, and his sin covered!" And yet, how necessary to the free *declaration of our ways* is an acquaintance with the way of forgiveness! Had not our great "High Priest passed into the heavens," how awful would have been the thought, that all things were "naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do!" We could only then have "covered our transgressions as Adam, by hiding our iniquity in our bosom." But now, even though "*our ways*" are so defiled, so crooked that we cannot but "abhor ourselves," on account of them, we are yet encouraged "boldly" to "*declare*" them all before God, with the assurance of finding present acceptance, and seasonable grace.

And now, having found the happy fruit of this sincere and child-like spirit, then follows the obligation of walking worthy of this mercy. Hence our need of the

prayer for continual *teaching*. The same heavenly guidance, that brought us into the way of return, we need for every successive step to the end, "Teach me Your way, O Lord: I will walk in Your truth." "*I have declared my*" ignorance, my sinfulness, and my whole experience before You, looking for Your pardoning mercy, Your teaching Spirit, and assisting grace, "*And You have heard me.*" O continue to me what You have been, and *teach me* more of Yourself!

The hypocrite may pray after this manner. But he never thus opens his heart, and "*declares his ways*" beneath his God. And are we sincere in our dealings with Him? How often do we treat our Almighty Friend as if we were weary of dealing with Him! And even when we do "*declare our ways*" before Him, are we not often content to leave the result as a matter of uncertainty? We do not watch for the answer to our prayer. It will come in the diligent exercise of faith, but not perhaps in our way. We may have asked for temporal blessings, and we receive spiritual. We may have "besought" deliverance from trial, and we receive "grace sufficient" to bear it. But this is the Lord's wise and gracious answer—*You heard me*. And how sweet are those mercies, which come to us manifestly marked with this inscription, "Received by prayer!" They are such encouragement to pray again. It is not our inevitable weakness, nor our lamented dullness, nor our abhorred wanderings, nor our opposed distractions, nor our mistaken unbelief; it is not any—no, nor all these—that can shut out prayer. If "iniquity" is not "regarded in our heart," we may always hear our Savior's voice, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto have you asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full."

27. Make me to understand the way of Your precepts; so shall I talk of Your wondrous works.

Notice the reiterated cries of the man of God for heavenly light, *Teach me Your statutes—make me to understand the way of Your precepts*. The need and the encouragement for these cries is equally manifest. Who has ever been known to *understand the way* of himself? And to whom—walking in a well-ordered conversation—has the Lord ever failed to show it? A man, untaught by the Spirit of God, may be able to criticize, and even clearly to expound, much of the word of God. But such a prayer as this has never ascended from the heart; the necessity of it has never been felt. And, doubtless, from this neglect of prayer have arisen those floating fancies and false and unscriptural doctrines, which crude, unexercised minds have too hastily embraced. Instead of humbly and simply asking, "*Make me to understand*"—men too often "lean to their own understanding," and are "vainly puffed up" by their fleshly mind, "*not holding the Head.*" Such men may obtain loose fragments of spiritual knowledge; but they will not be in the faith, "grounded and settled." They never know when they are upon safe ground; and being "unlearned and unstable, they wrest the

Scriptures"—except the sovereign grace of God interpose, "unto their own destruction."

Never must we forget, that teaching from above is indispensable to a right knowledge of the most simple truths. Ignorance and prejudice pervert the understanding. "Spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned." Divine doctrines can only be apprehended by Divine light. But under heavenly teaching, the deeper and more mysterious truths (so far as they are needful to be understood) are manifested with the same clearness, as the more elementary doctrines: "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit. Now we have received—not the spirit of the world, *but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*"

Wondrous, indeed, is the spiritual revelation in the knowledge of Himself; including "the hope of His calling;—the riches of the glory of His inheritance in His saints;—the exceeding greatness of His power" manifested to, and wrought in, His people;—no other or less than that "which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead." In the understanding of the way, we would be progressing until the new man "grows up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The smallest attainment in this knowledge is (as the great day will fully declare) of infinitely greater value than the highest intelligence in the field of earthly science.

But how important is it to grow in this knowledge! Theoretical attainment is at a stand. Spiritual and practical knowledge is always advancing. Little, indeed, comparatively, is necessary for salvation. But much for comfort and steadfastness—much also for the clear discernment of that narrow way *of the precepts* so difficult to trace, and when traced so difficult to maintain. Not less important is it to keep the object in constant view. Why do I desire to *understand that way?* That I may commend it to others—that I may *talk of Your wondrous works*. Abhorred be the thought of indulging in a self-complacent view of my attainments! But oh! let my God be more admired by me, and glorified in me. And may I advance both myself and others in His obedience and praise!

Often do we complain of restraint in religious conversation. But the prayer—*Make me to understand while I talk*—will bring "a live coal to our lips" from the altar of God, "Our mouths will then speak out of the abundance of the heart," and "minister grace to the hearers." Humility, teachableness, simplicity, will bring light into the understanding, influence the heart, "open the lips," and unite every member that we have in the service and praise of God.

28. My soul melts for heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word.

Is this David, "whose heart is as the heart of a lion, here utterly *melting*?" But the sorrows, as the joys of the spiritual man—dealing immediately with the Infinite and Eternal God—are beyond conception. Ordinary courage may support under the trials of this life; but when "the arrows of the Almighty are within us, the poison thereof drinks up our spirit." How, then, can the Christian's lot be so enviable, when their *souls* thus *melt for heaviness*? But this, be it remembered, is only "for a season." There is a "needs-be" for it, while it remains: and in the end it "will be found unto praise, and honor, and glory." Never, perhaps, are their graces more lively, or the ground of their assurance more clear, than in these seasons of sorrow. They complain, indeed, of the diversified power of indwelling sin. But their very complaints are the evidence of the mighty working of indwelling grace. For what is it but the principle of faith, that makes unbelief their burden? What but hope, that struggles with their tears? What but love, that makes their coldness a grief? What but humility, that causes them to loathe their pride? What but the secret spring of thankfulness, that shows them their unthankfulness, and shames them for it? And, therefore, the very depth of "that *heaviness* which *melts their souls*" away, is the exhibition of the strength of God's work within, upholding them in perseverance of conflict to the end. Would not the believer then, when eyeing in his heaviest moments the most prosperous condition of the ungodly, say, "Let me not eat of their dainties?" Far better, and, we may add, far happier, is godly sorrow than worldly joy. In the midst of his misery, the Christian would not exchange his hope in the gospel—though often obscured by unbelief, and clouded by fear—for all "the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." "If the heart knows his own bitterness, a stranger does not intermeddle with his joy." Yet the bitterness is keenly felt. Sin displeases a tender and gracious Father. It has "pierced" the heart that loves him; and shed the blood that saves him. It grieves the indwelling Comforter of his soul. God expects to see him a mourner; and he feels he has reason enough to mourn, "*My soul melts for heaviness.*"

But this cry of distress is sometimes that of the child under his Father's needful chastisement. The world is dethroned, but not extirpated, in the heart. Much dross is yet to be removed. The sources of the too attractive earthly joy must be embittered: and now it is that the discipline of the cross forces the cry, "*My soul melts for heaviness.*" Yet in the midst of heaviness, the child of God cannot forget that he is loved—that he is saved; and the recollection of this sovereign mercy makes his tears of godly sorrow, tears of joy.

But this *melting heaviness* has not wrought its work, until it has bowed us before the throne of grace with the pleading cry of faith—*Strengthen me!* For do we stand by the strength of our own resolutions or habits of grace? Unless the Lord renew His supply from moment to moment, all is frail and withering. But what burden or difficulty is too great for Almighty strength? "Fear not, you worm Jacob; you shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small." And especially is our success assured, when the plea is drawn, as it is repeatedly in this Psalm—*according to Your word*. For what does that word assure us?, "As Your days, so

shall Your strength be." "Will He plead against me"—said Job, "with His great power? No! but He will put strength in me." Thus David found it in his own case: "In the day when I cried, You answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul." Thus also to the Apostle was the promise given and fulfilled: "My grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And is not "the God of Israel" still "he who gives strength and power to His people?" still the same "faithful God, who will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it?"

When we are most sensible of our utter helplessness, and most simple in our reliance upon Divine strength, then it is, that the "*soul melting for heaviness*," is most especially upheld and established. "*Heaviness* in the heart of man makes it stoop; but a good word makes it glad." And how reviving is that "good word" of the Gospel, which proclaims the Savior anointed to "give the garment of praise for the spirit of *heaviness*," and gifted with "the tongue of the learned, that he might know how to speak a word in season unto him that is weary!" And no less encouraging is it to view *Him* "*melting for heaviness*" "sore amazed, and very heavy" under the accumulated weight of imputed guilt; learning by this bitter discipline, "in that He Himself suffered being tempted, to support them that are tempted." Yet was He, like His faithful servant, *strengthened according to His Father's word*, in the moment of his bitterest agony, by the agency of His own creation. And this faithful support, given to the Head, is the seal and pledge of what every member in every trouble will most assuredly enjoy. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in His people, so their consolation also abounds by Christ." The blessed word will supply all their need—life for their quickening, light for their direction, comfort for their enjoyment, strength for their support, "*Strengthen me according to Your word.*"

Lord, may I ever be kept from despondency—regarding it as sinful in itself, dishonorable to Your name, and weakening to my soul; and though I must "needs be sometime in heaviness through manifold temptations," yet let the power of faith be in constant exercise, that I may be able to expostulate with my soul, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disturbed within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

29. Remove from me the way of lying; and grant me Your law graciously.

Every deviation in principle and conduct from the strait and narrow path, is a *way of lying*. Every traveler in *the way* "feeds on the ashes" of his own delusion. Does it seem a marvel, that the man of God should deprecate so earnestly the influence of gross sin? "The brand plucked out of the fire" retains a susceptibility of the fire. The oldest Christian in the family of God might at any moment of

unwatchfulness be captivated by the chain of his former sins. Might not the recollection of past compliances with this shameful sin naturally have suggested the prayer—*Remove from me the way of lying?* But even in the profession of the Gospel, should we "be removed from Him that called us into the grace of Christ unto another gospel;" should erroneous doctrines find a place in our system; and—as the natural consequence of doctrinal errors—should any inconsistency be marked in our practice; should there be any allowed principles of sinful indulgence, self-righteousness, conformity to the world, or shrinking from the daily cross—then, indeed, will the prayer naturally flow from our hearts—*Remove from me the way of lying.*

Most justly are ways such as these called "*ways of lying.*" They promise what it is impossible, in the nature of things, that they can ever perform: and prove to their deluded followers, that "those who observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercy." We can be at no loss to trace these "*ways,*" to their proper source;—to him, who, "when he speaks a lie, speaks of his own for he is a liar, and the father of it." A lie was his first—alas! too successful—instrument of temptation, by which he "beguiled Eve through his subtlety," and still does he pursue the same deadly work throughout the world lying under his sway, beguiling the blinded "children of disobedience," into the awful deception of mistaking their God, and into the blind choice of preferring "broken cisterns" to "the fountain of living waters."

The gracious knowledge of the law is the only means of the *removal* of this evil way. David, as a king, had it written by him. He wished it written on him—not the book only before his eyes, but stamped on the heart. The external knowledge is the common benefit of all. The *gracious* knowledge is the covenant-blessing of the Lord's people—the only effective principle of holiness. The law is still what it was—an enemy to the ungodly—forcing a hateful light upon their conscience; but a delight to the servant of God—framing his will, and directing his conduct. Thus truth extirpates *lying*. Christ reigns instead of Belial.

Thus also we are enabled to "keep our hearts"—those leading wanderers, that mislead the rest. For wherever we see wandering eyes, wandering feet, and a wandering tongue, all flow from a heart, that has taken its own liberty in wandering from God. But with the law as our rule, and the Spirit as our guide, we shall be directed and kept in a safe and happy path.

Grant me Your law graciously. Grant me a clearer perception of its holy character—a more sensitive shrinking from transgressing it—a more cordial approval of its spirit—a more entire conformity to its directions.

30. *I have chosen the way of truth: Your judgments have I laid before me.*

Only two ways lie before us for our choice, "*the way of lying,*" and "*the way of*

truth. God by the light of His word guides us into one—Satan by his temptations allures us into the other. *The way of lying* is the natural choice of man. The *choice of the way of truth* is the Lord's work in the hearts of His people—the seal of His special eternal love. His teaching shows us *the way*; and His grace enables us to "*choose*" it. And who in his subsequent course has ever found reason to alter his first determination? Does Mary regret her "choice of the good part?" One whose solid and reflecting judgment was not likely to make a rash or hasty choice, tells us, of the outset of his course, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." The experience of twenty years—instead of bringing matter for repentance—only confirmed him in his choice: and he repeats his determination with increasing energy of expression; "*Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*" In the same spirit one of the ancient fathers expresses himself: "If I have any possessions, health, credit, learning—this is all the contentment I have of them—that I may have *something to despise for Christ, who comprises in His own person all and everything that is most desirable.*"

The connection of this verse with the preceding well illustrates the bias of the believer's heart. His experience of the deceitfulness of sin, Satan, and his own heart, stirs up the prayer, "*Remove from me the way of lying.*" But his choice is expressed in this verse, "*I have chosen the way of truth.*" The sincere desire to have "*the way of lying removed from us,*" is a clear evidence, that we have already "*chosen the way of truth:*" that "the spirit of truth has guided us to Him," who is indeed "*the way of truth*"—the true and only "way to God!" And of all ways that could be set before the Christian, this is the way he would "*choose*"—as bringing most glory to his God, exalting the Savior, honoring the Spirit of God, and securing the salvation of his own soul. Whatever becomes of me—the Christian would feel—'I would have no other way than this. Yes, though I should perish, I would abide in it. So transcendent is the discovery of the glory of God—scarcely less clear than the glory of heaven itself!'

The practical pathway, however, is often rugged—always narrow. We may have to encounter not only the reviling of an ungodly world, but even the suspicions of our brethren, who may not always understand our motives. Yet if our heart is upright with God, "none of these things will move us. Our choice is made, and we are prepared to abide the cost."

But that our choice may be daily established, let us not forget the treasury of our life, light, and grace. Let us *lay the "judgments of God before us."* For we have always some new lesson to learn—some new duty to perform—some new snare to avoid. We must therefore walk by rule—as under the eye of a jealous God, who enlightens and cheers our path—under the eye of the ungodly, who "watch for our halting"—under the eye of weak Christians, who might be stumbled by our unsteady walk—under the eye of established Christians, who will be yet further established by the testimony of our consistent profession. The Gospel affords all the material for this strict and accurate walk. All is given that is needed. The

obedience that is enjoined is secured. "God working in us," enables us to work for Him; and while we are humbly looking for further supplies, and diligently improving what has been already bestowed, He is pledged by promise to assist, as we are bound by duty to obey.

What then—let me inquire—is the choice which I have made? I would remember that it is for eternity. And if, through the grace that has first chosen me, "*I have chosen the way of truth,*"—is the effect of this choice daily visible in a life and conversation well ordered according to the word of God? If it is good to "hide that word in my heart," as a safeguard against sin; it is good also "*to lay it before*" my eyes, as the chart to guide my course—the model to direct my work—the support to uphold my weakness.

31. *I have stuck to Your testimonies; O Lord, put me not to shame.*

We have just seen the *choice* of the man of God, and the rule by which he acted upon it. Now we see his perseverance—*first choosing the way*—then *sticking to it*. While he complained of "*his soul cleaving to the dust,*" he would yet say—*I have stuck to Your testimonies*. Thus did he illustrate the apostle's delineation of the Christian's two hearts (as a converted African expressed it), "I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." In the midst, however, of the most painful conflicts, the child of God holds fast his confidence. He feels that he hates the sin that he commits, and loves the Savior, whom, in spite of himself, he dishonors; so that, with all his sins and unworthiness, he fears not to put in his claim among the family of God.

But, reader, seriously ask yourself—How did you become a Christian? Was it by birth and education, or by choice? If indeed by grace you have been enabled to "*choose the way of truth,*" then be sure you firmly stick to it; or better, far better, that you had not made choice of it at all. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.—If you *continue* in My word, then are you My disciples indeed. It had been better for you not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after you had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to you." Yet, praised be God for the security of perseverance! He who enabled you to "put your hand to the plough" will keep it there in the habit of faith, firm and steadfast. "The Lord will perfect that which concerns you."

Yet this "cleaving to the Lord," can only be maintained by unceasing conflict. The length and weariness of the way, and the slowness of your progress, are sources of constant and harassing trial. Revert, then, to the ground of your original

choice. Was it made under the Lord's light and direction? This reason may well bind you to "*stick to*" it. For are not the ways of God as pleasant—is not Christ as lovely—is not heaven as desirable—as at the beginning? No—have you not even more reason to adhere to your *choice*, than you had to make it? It was formed before at least you could fully know for yourself. Now "you have tasted"—you have the seal of experience. Is not the crown more joyous in the nearer prospect?

Backslider! "has God been to you a wilderness, and a land of darkness," that you virtually give your testimony after trial—'Satan is the better master, and I will return to him?' The world is the happiest path; and I will walk in it. This is, indeed, choosing a murderer in the stead of a Father, "forsaking the fountain" for the "broken cistern." Oh! must there not be repentance in this path? May that repentance come before it be too late! Ponder who it was, that befriended you in the moment of a dreadful extremity, and snatched you as "a brand from the burning." Ponder the endearing proofs of His love—condescending to become a man, "a man of sorrows," and to die in the agony of the cross, bearing for you the eternal curse of God. And does not gratitude remind you, what returns of faithful service are due from a creature so infinitely indebted to Him? Surely the steadfast perseverance with which His heart cleaved to His costly work, may serve to put to shame your unsteadiness in "*sticking to His testimonies.*"

Believer! you are determined to abide by your choice—but not in your own strength. Remember him, who one hour declared, that he would sooner die with Christ than deny Him; and the next hour denied Him with oaths and curses. Learn, then, to follow up your resolution with instant prayer, "*O Lord, put me not to shame.*" Leave me not to myself, lest I become a *shame* to myself, and an offence to Your Church. "I will keep Your statutes. O forsake me not utterly." Dependence upon the Lord, in a deep sense of our weakness, is the principle of perseverance. Never will he shut out the prayer of His faithful servant. He has promised, "My people shall never be ashamed;" and therefore, taking firm hold of His promise, you may "go on your way rejoicing."

32. I will run the way of Your commandments, when You shall enlarge my heart.

A glowing picture of the Christian's delight in the ways of God! If we "*have chosen the way of God's commandments,*" and have been able to "*stick to*" this way, surely we shall wish to "*run in it*" with constancy and cheerfulness. We shall want to mend our pace. If we walk, we shall long to "*run.*" There is always the same reason for progress, that there was for setting out. Necessity, advantage, enjoyment, spur us on to the end. Whatever progress we have made, we shall desire to make more; we shall go on praying and walking, and praying that we may walk with a swifter motion; we shall be dissatisfied, yet not discouraged,

"faint, yet pursuing." Now this is as it should be. This is after the pattern of the holy Apostle: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." But the secret as well as the pattern of Christian progress is—looking beyond the Apostle, and the "so great cloud of witnesses, with which we are encompassed"—and "looking unto Jesus." Faith is the principle of life, and supplies the daily motion of life;—directing our eye to Him as "the Author," until He "becomes the Finisher," of our faith. This is at once our duty, our privilege, our happiness, and our strength. This is the point, at which we begin to run; and we "so run, that we may obtain."

But let us more distinctly mark the medium through which this spiritual energy flows—*an enlarged heart*. Without this influence how could we run this *way of God's commandments*? Such is the extent and latitude of the course, that a straitened heart is utterly inadequate to carry us through. There must be large treasures of knowledge, in order that from a rich "treasure-house the good things" may pour out abundantly. For indeed spiritual "knowledge" is the principle of "multiplied grace." Scriptural truths, divinely fixed in the understanding, powerfully influence the heart. Christian privilege also greatly advances this important end. In seasons of depression we are "so troubled, that we cannot speak." We cannot pour out our hearts, as at other times, with a large measure of spirit and life. But when "we joy in God, having received the atonement," the spirit is invigorated, as with oil on the wheels, or as "with wings to mount" on high in the service of praise.

Very different, however, is this *enlargement of heart* from enlargement of gifts. Fluency of utterance is too often fearfully separated from the spiritual life, and utterly unconnected with delight in *the way of God's commandments*. It is expression, not feeling—counterfeit grace—public, not secret or personal, religion. The yoke of sin is not broken, and the self-deceiver will be found at last among the deluded throng of gifted hypocrites, "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord."

Indeed the spiritual principle is far too little realized. At the commencement of the course, conscious guilt straitens the approach to the throne of grace. Unbelief imprisons the soul. And even when the deliverer is known, who "sets at liberty them that are bruised," still the body of death with all its clogging burden and confinement presses down the soul. Unbelief also continues to work, to narrow the conceptions of the gospel, and by the painful recollections of the past, to bring in distrust, distance, and bondage. And most painful is this restraint. For the soul, which is but beginning to see how desirable is the favor of God, feels also an earnest desire to honor Him. And to him who—having fully "tasted that the Lord is gracious"—asks, "What shall I render unto the Lord?" this remaining influence of "the spirit of bondage" is more afflicting, than perhaps was a greater measure of it in a less enlightened stage of his way. Still, however, this legal

spirit pursues him. His comforts, ebbing and flowing, according as he is dissatisfied or satisfied with his Christian progress, clearly evince a secret "confidence in the flesh," greatly hindering that "rejoicing in Christ Jesus," which so *enlarges the heart*.

Thus by the shackles of sin, unbelief, and self-righteousness, we are indeed 'sore let and hindered in running the race set before us.' (Collect for Advent.) The light is obscured. Faith loses sight of its object. What otherwise would be a delight becomes a weariness. Obedience is irksome; self-denial intolerable; the cross heavy. The heart is, as it were, "shut up, and it cannot get forth." Faith is so low: desires are so faint; hopes so narrow, that it seems impossible to make progress. Frequent defeats induce despondency. The world is resorted to. Sin ensnares and captivates. Thus "we did run well; but we have been hindered."

This sad evil naturally leads us to inquire for the remedy. The case is backsliding, not apostasy. The remedy therefore is in that *engagement*, which embraces a wider expanse of light, and a more full confidence of love. We find that we have not been "straitened" in God, but "in our own affections." If then the rich fool thought of enlarging his barns, when his stores had increased upon him, much more should we "enlarge the place of our tent," that we may make more room for God, encourage larger expectations, if we would have more full manifestations of Him. Let not the vessels fail, before the oil stays. Continually let the petition be sent up, "Oh that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast!" Whatever cause we have to cry out, "My leanness, my leanness!"—still let us, in the exercise of faith and prayer, be waiting for a more cheerful ability to love, serve, and praise. Let us be restless, until the prison-doors are again opened, and the command is issued to the prisoners, "Go forth: and to them that are in darkness—Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places." Who knows but the Lord will once more shine upon us; once more unloose our fetters, and renew our strength?

But again and again must we be reminded that every motion must begin with God. *I will run*—but how? not in my own strength, but by "the good hand of my God upon me," delivering and *enlarging my heart*. He does not say—I will make no efforts, unless You work for me; but if *You will enlarge—I will run*. Weakness is not the plea for indolence, but for quickening grace. "Draw me"—says the Church, "we will run after You." Effectual calling will issue in *running*." Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." The secret of Christian energy and success is a *heart enlarged* in the love of God.

Let me then begin betimes—make haste—keep straight on—fix my eye on the mark, "endure unto the end." I may yet expect in the joy of blessed surprise to exclaim, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." Godly sorrow had made me serious. Now let holy joy make me active. "The joy of the Lord is my strength;" and I am ready, under the power of constraining love, to work and to toil—to run without weariness—to "march

onward" without fainting; not measuring my pace by my own strength, but looking to Him who "strengthens with all might by His Spirit in the inner man."

Happy fruit of wrestling prayer and diligent waiting on God! Joy in God, and strength to walk with Him, with increasing knowledge of Him, increasing communion with Him, and increasing confidence in Him.

33. Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.

We need no instruction in the way of sin. That has been our way, ever since Adam "sought out his own invention." The ungodly "desire no knowledge of the way of God's statutes." The heart leads the judgment, and "their heart is enmity to the law of God." But for a child of God, this is a prayer for constant use. The outward revelation is of no avail without the inward teaching. The Divine Instructor must interpret and apply His own rule. However plain the word may be, the darkness must be removed from the understanding. Light will not show an object, except the faculty of sight be given. A blind man cannot see at noonday. We know nothing spiritually, except as we are taught of God. The more we are taught, the more we feel our need of teaching, and the more pressing will be our cries for this invaluable blessing. The blind man must be led in the plainest and most direct, as well as in the more difficult and rugged paths. And thus do we need the shining of light from above—not only in the "deep things of God"—but for the reception of the most elementary truths. And yet we want not this knowledge for its own sake—to feed pride or speculation—but for its practical influence. For of what avail is the discovery even of important truth, if we be not molded into its likeness, and constrained "into the obedience of faith?" The connection of every thought with Christian practice, here directed to its proper end, is a most striking proof of the Divine origin of *the statutes*. The most clear instructions for the regulation of our conduct flow from single sentences or expressions in these "*statutes*;" and this clearly proves an infinite wisdom in their distribution, a reference in the eternal mind to every detail of practical duty, and a Divine power and unction, applying the word to the several circumstances of daily conduct. For, indeed, what mind but the mind of God could have comprehended in so small a compass such a vast system of instruction? In this view, therefore, the Lord's teaching becomes the spring of obedience. For how can we "*keep*" a way, which we do not understand? And who was ever "*taught the way of the Lord's statutes*," who had not his heart constrained and directed by their spiritual beauty and sweetness? In this path we realize union with the Savior; "the love of God is perfected in us;" and our confidence is established before God.

The object nearest to the believer's heart, and which causes him many an anxious—and too often many an unbelieving thought—is the grace of

perseverance. Now the Lord's *teaching* is the principle of perseverance. It is "*the light of life*," enlightening the mind, and quickening the heart. Under this influence, therefore, we live—we endure—we cannot fail of keeping *the way unto the end*. Thus the end crowns the work. For with this blessing of perseverance, is sealed to us the hope of victory over our spiritual enemies, and the participation of our Savior's glory. Confidence, indeed, without prayer and dependence upon our glorious Head, is most daring presumption. But that "well-ordered and sure covenant," which "is all our salvation, and all our desire," engages for our continuance in "*the way of the Lord's statutes*." "*I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me. I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*"

34. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; yes, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

'He who is his own teacher'—says Bernard—and one greater than Bernard, 'has a fool for his master.' Man cannot teach what he does not know; and of God, and of His law, he knows nothing. Therefore the beginning of wisdom is a consciousness of ignorance, a distrust of our own understanding, and the heartfelt prayer, "*Give me understanding*." The spiritual *understanding* is the gift of Jesus Christ. He directs us to Himself, as its fountain, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." This *understanding* differs from mere intellectual discernment or speculative knowledge. It is the spring of spiritual activity in our walk with God; so that our obedience is not outward and reluctant, but filial delight and wholeness of heart:—we desire not only to *keep the law of God to the end*, but every day *to the end*, "*with our whole heart*."—Such are our obligations towards Him, that we ought to study very accurately the character of our walk with Him; always remembering that service without *the heart—the whole heart*—is hateful in His sight; and that what is now wilfully withheld, will gradually draw away the rest in apostasy from Him. Now are we seeking more "engagedness of heart" for Him? Then will this prayer be a suitable expression of our need, and the utterance of a humble, resolute petitioner. It is not, however, enough, that we have once received, unless we are constantly receiving. We must ask, that we may receive; but after we have received, we must ask again. Yet is this prayer never offered up, until the soul has in part received what it is here seeking for. The natural man is "wise in his own conceit," and has therefore no idea of his need of Divine teaching.

But we must not be satisfied with even a clear apprehension of the doctrines of the Bible, and of the "truth as it is in Jesus." "*Give me understanding*"—'not only that I may believe these doctrines, but that I may *keep and observe* them.' In every path of duty, this cry is repeated, with an importunity that is never wearisome to the ears of our gracious Father. And in how many unnoticed

instances has the answer been given, when some clear and heavenly ray has darted unexpectedly into the mind, or some providential concurrence of unforeseen circumstances has disentangled a path before intricate and involved, and marked it before us with the light of a sunbeam! How many whispers of conscience! how many seasonable suggestions in moments of darkness and perplexity, may the observant child of God record, as the answer to this needful prayer! "Whoever is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." Nor will our growth in spiritual *understanding* fail to evidence itself in the steady consistency of a well-ordered conversation! "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." If then knowledge is valuable according to its usefulness, one ray of this practical knowledge—the result of prayer for heavenly teaching—is more to be prized than the highest attainments of speculative religion—flowing from mere human instruction.

35. *Make me to go in the path of Your commandments; for therein do I delight.*

We are equally ignorant of *the path of God's commandments*, and impotent to *go in it*. We need therefore double assistance. Our mind must be enlightened; our hearts constrained; else our knowledge of this humbling *path* would make us shrink from it. But under the complete influence of Divine grace, when *understanding has been given* to discern the beauty of it, the soul's warmest desire is fixed upon it. Conscious helplessness looks upward—*Make me to go*: and He who said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house," speaks the same word of quickening life and power to the *soul "giving heed,"* "expecting to receive something of Him." It is delightful to acknowledge of this work, that "all is of God"—that "it is He who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure." To him only can it belong. For since the natural inclination "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," Almighty power must introduce a new and active bias, "Turn me, and I shall be turned." "*Make me to go in the path of Your commandments.*"

But even when brought into *this path*, still we need accelerated motion to run with increasing alacrity. We need to take "the Lord God for our strength; and He shall make our feet like hinds' feet, and He shall *make us to walk* upon the high places." The *path*, indeed, is uninviting to the eye of sense. This distorted vision brings all its difficulties into full view; hiding all its counter-balancing enjoyments. Let us, however, exercise that "faith," which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Let us exhibit our proper character, "walking by faith, and not by sight," and our discernment of unseen things will be more clear, and our enjoyment of them more permanent. The prayer will then be with increasing earnestness, "*Make me to go in the path of Your commandments.*"

But we must not be content with walking in this way; we must seek to "*delight in it.*" Delight is the marrow of religion. "God loves a cheerful giver," and accepts obedience, only when it is given, not when it is *forced*. He loves the service of that man, who considers it his highest privilege to render it, and whose heart rejoices in the way, "as a giant to run his race." Fervent prayer and cheerful obedience mark the experience of the thriving Christian. As a true "child of Zion, he is joyful in his king;" he loves His service, and counts it "perfect freedom"—the rule of love, mercy, and grace.

But is the self-condemned penitent distressed by this description of a child of God? He cannot find the same marks in himself; and he too hastily concludes, that he does not belong to the heavenly family; not considering, that his very grief is caused by his love to, and "*delight in*" that way in which he is so hindered, and in which he daily prays, "*Make me to go.*" It was, probably, the same sense of weakness and inability, "*to go in the path of God's commandments,*" which urged David's prayer; and if it urges yours, poor trembling penitent—if it sends you to a throne of grace, you will, before long, receive an answer of peace, and "go on your way rejoicing."

This *delight in the path* is not only following the "man after God's own heart;" but it is the image of David's Lord, and our forerunner in this path. He could testify to His Father, "I delight to do Your will, O My God;" and to His disciples, "I have meat to eat that you know not of. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." And as a proof of the intenseness of His delight he could, to their great amazement, "go before them" to Jerusalem, unappalled by the "baptism" of blood which awaited Him; yes, even "straitened" with the unquenchable ardor of His love, "until it was accomplished."

36. *Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness.*

But what "*makes us to go in the path of God's commandments?*" The force of His Almighty love effectually inclines the will, as with a Divine touch. The day of His power, in which He makes us willing, is a time of love. "I drew them"—says he, "with cords of a man, and with bands of love." Every man, who is conscious of the counteracting bias within, will deeply feel the need of this prayer, "*Incline my heart.*" The native principle of man draws him to his own self—to his own indulgence—pleasure—*covetousness*—assuming a thousand forms of gratifying self, at the expense of love to God. Few but are ready to condemn this principle in others, while perhaps it may be their own "easily-besetting sin." When the mind is grasping after the world, as if it were our portion, we have the greatest reason to "take heed" to our Lord's admonition, and beware of "covetousness." When we invest earthly gratifications with any inherent excellency—*virtually* putting them in the place of God—then will be a season for special supplication—

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness.

There is probably no principle so opposed to the *Lord's testimonies*. It casts out the principle of obedience, since the love of God cannot co-exist with the love of the world; and the very desire to serve Mammon is a proof of unfaithfulness to God. We mark the deadly influence in direct breaches of the law of God. Balaam, in the indulgence of this propensity, set his will in mad contradiction to God; Ahab was tempted to murder; David, to murder and adultery; Achan, to steal; Judas, both to steal from his fellows, and to betray his Master; Gehazi and Ananias to lying. And besides—what is the matter of common but painful observation—how much of the good seed of the kingdom, that was springing up with the promise of a plentiful harvest, has this weed of rank luxuriance "choked, that it has become unfruitful!" Our Lord's parables, therefore—His providence—His promises—His terms of discipleship—His counsels—His own example of poverty and renunciation of this world's comfort—all are directed against this destructive principle. The power of the love of Christ delivered Matthew and Zaccheus from its influence, and "*inclined their hearts to the testimonies of God.*" And has not faith still the same power to turn the heart from the world, from sin, from self, to Christ? Learn, then, to rest upon the promise of His love, and to delight in His *testimonies*. Earthly cares will be cast upon him, and earthly prospects will lose their splendor. This life of faith—living in union with a heavenly Savior, involves the only effective principle of resistance. Those who are risen with Christ will be temperate in earthly things, "setting their affections on things above." Such—such alone—will "mortify the members that are upon the earth—evil concupiscence, and *covetousness, which is idolatry.*"

We desire to sit loose to our earthly comforts. Are we enabled to check our natural discontent with the Lord's dealings with us, and to restrain our eagerness to "seek great things for ourselves," by the recollection of His word, "Seek them not?"

Let us not forget, that the inclination—even if it is not brought into active and perceptible motion, is fatally destructive of the life of religion. "Those who *will be rich* fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." Awful warning to professors!, "The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." A most important exhortation to the people of God!" But you, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness." If the Lord loves you, He will not indeed lose you; but unless you "take heed, and beware of covetousness," He will not spare you. In the midst, therefore, of temptation without, and a world of sin within, go onwards, with the pilgrim's prayer indelibly fixed on your heart, "*Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness.*"

37. Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken me in Your way.

So strongly does the man of God deprecate temptation to self-indulgence, that he prays to be kept at the greatest possible distance from it. That his *heart* may not be *inclined to it*: he desires that *his eyes may be turned away from beholding it*. Keeping the eye is a grand means of "keeping the heart." Satan has so infused his poison into all the objects around us, that all furnish fuel for temptation: and the heart—naturally inclined to evil, and hankering after vanity—is stolen away in a moment. *Vanity* includes "all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." All is sin, "because it is not of the Father, but is of the world." Of all that belongs to earth, "the preacher, the son of David"—standing on the vantage-ground, and having taken within his view the widest horizon of this world's excellency, has pronounced his judgment, "Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities! all is vanity." We have just mentioned "the lusts of other things choking" *many a promising profession*. Our Lord's solemn caution to His own disciples implies their injury to a *sincere profession*, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares." Some, indeed, seem to walk, as if they were proof against temptation. They venture to the very edge of the precipice, under a vain assurance that no danger is to be apprehended. But such a confidence is upon the brink of a grievous fall. The tender-hearted child of God, trusting in the promise, that "Sin shall not have dominion over him," knows that he can only enjoy the security of it, while he is shrinking from every occasion of sin. He "hates even the garment spotted by the flesh;" and, remembering how often his outward senses have ministered to the workings of his weak and treacherous heart, he continues in prayer, "*Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity!*"

Probably the recollection of the circumstance of his own sin, would to the end of his life remind David of his special need of this prayer. Yet who that is conscious of his own weakness and corruption, will find the prayer unsuitable to his circumstances of daily temptation? But we must watch as well as pray. For as watchfulness without prayer is presumption, so prayer without watchfulness is self-delusion. To pray that "*our eyes*" may be "*turned from vanity*," without "making a covenant with our eyes," that they should not *behold* it, is like "taking fire in our bosoms," and expecting "not to be burnt," because we have prayed that we might not be burnt. If we pray not to be "led into temptation," we must "watch that we enter not into it." The sincerity of our prayer will be proved by the watchfully avoiding the circumstances and occasions of temptation. The fear of sin will manifest itself by a fear of temptation to sin. "The knife will be put to the throat, if we be given to appetite." We shall be afraid of the wine sparkling in the glass.

But where is the harm of *beholding vanity*, if we do not follow it? When Eve *beheld* the forbidden fruit, perhaps she did not think of taking it: and when she

took it, she did not think of eating it: but the beginning of sin "is as the letting out of water," whose progress once opened, beats down all before it. And who, after our "beguiled mother," has not found the eye an inlet to sin? When Bunyan's pilgrims were obliged to pass through Vanity Fair, beset on every side with temptations and allurements, they stopped their eyes and ears, and quickening their pace, cried, "*Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity!*" A striking reproof to us, who too often loiter and gaze, until we begin to covet those vanities, to which, as Christians, we "are dead!"

Is it asked—What will most effectually "*turn my eyes from vanity?*" Not the seclusion of contemplative retirement—not the relinquishment of our lawful connection with the world; but the transcendent beauty of Jesus unveiled to our eyes, and fixing our hearts. This will "*turn our eyes from vanity*" in its most glittering forms. The sight of the "pearl of great price" dims the luster of the "goodliest pearls" of earth; at once deadens us to the enticements of the world, and urges us forward in the pursuit of the prize. And is not this our object? It is not enough, that through special mercy I am preserved from temptations. I want to be *quickened* to more life, energy, delight, and devotedness *in the way of my God*. The secret of Christian progress is simplicity and diligence. "*This one thing I do—forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before; I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*" The Spirit leaves no wish in the heart for *beholding vanity*. The world with all its flowery paths, is a dreary wilderness; and Christ and heaven are the only objects of desire, "He who shuts his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high; his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure. *Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.*" Precious promises to those, that flee from temptation, and desire to walk in the ways of God!

38. Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to Your fear.

Often—instead of being *quickened in the way*—I am fainting under the pressure of unbelief. What then is my resource? Only *the word* of promise. Lord! seal—*establish Your word to Your servant—devoted* as I am—as I would be—to *Your fear*. If "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"—a "treasure"—a "strong confidence" "a fountain of life"—how wise—how rich—how safe—how happy—is *he who "is devoted to"* it! "Blessed" indeed is he—with the favor of his God, the secret of His love, the teaching of His grace, and the mercy of His covenant. The promises of the Old Testament are generally connected with the fear of God, as in the New Testament they are linked with faith. But in truth, so identified are these two principles in their operation, that the faith, by which we apprehend the forgiveness of God, and the privileges of His kingdom, issues in a godly, reverential, filial fear. To be *devoted to this fear*, completes the character of a *servant of God*—the highest honor in the universe—the substantial joy of heaven

itself. It is an obedience of choice, of reverence, and of love. "Joining himself to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord—to be His servant." "Yes, gracious Lord, I had rather be bound than loosed." I only wish to be loosed from the bonds of sin, that I might be bound to You forever. My heart is treacherous; lay Your own bonds upon me. "O Lord, truly I am Your servant: You have loosed my bonds;" *I am "devoted to Your fear."* Is this my desire, my mind, my determination, my character? Then let me plead my title to an interest in the promises of the word—rich and free, "exceeding great and precious,"—all mine, "yes and amen in Christ Jesus;" let me plead, that every *word* may be "*established*" in my victory over sin, advancing knowledge of Christ, experience of His love, conformity to His image, and, finally, in my preservation in Him unto eternal life.

But how far *has* the fear of God operated with me as a safeguard from sin, and an habitual rule of conduct? David's confidence in the promises of God, far from lessening his jealousy over himself, only made him more "*devoted to the fear*" of God. And if my assurance be well grounded, it will ever be accompanied with holy fear; the influence will be known by "standing more in awe of God's word;" having a more steady abhorrence of sin, and a dread of "grieving the Holy Spirit of God." Thus this filial fear produces a holy confidence; while confidence serves to strengthen fear: and their mutual influence quickens devotedness to the work of the Lord.

It is interesting to remark, that the Christian privilege of assurance is not confined to the New Testament dispensation. David's pleading to have the "*word of his God established unto him,*" was grounded upon the tried foundations of faith. And this direct act of faith, as it regards God in Christ, His engagements and His promises, cannot be too confident. The promises are made to the whole Church, that we might each look for our part and interest in them. God loves to have His own seal and hand-writing brought before Him. "Put Me in remembrance"—He says: "let us plead together." "He cannot deny Himself."

Very cheering is it to mark, how the Lord *establishes His word* in our own experience. Every day He is fulfilling some promise, and a word made good at one time encourages our confidence for another. The word performed in part is an earnest of the whole, assuring us of the time, when we shall acknowledge His faithfulness, "who performs *all things* for us." Thus, as the word is eternally *established* on the foundation of the Divine engagements, its certainty is sealed to our own conviction. Our confidence is established, that if He has spoken a word, He may be trusted for that word.

This, then, is the exercise and the power of faith. I bring wants. I bring *Your word* of promise. *Establish Your word to Your servant.* You have bought me with a precious price; You have made me Yours: You have subdued my heart to

Yourself, so that it is now *"devoted to Your fear."* Whatever, therefore, Your covenant has provided for my sanctification, my humiliation, my chastisement, my present and everlasting consolation, *"Establish this word:"* let it be fulfilled in me; for I am *"Your servant, devoted to Your fear."*

39. Turn away my reproach which I fear: for Your judgments are good.

There is a *reproach*, which we have no cause to *fear*, but rather to glory in. It is one of the chief privileges of the Gospel—the honorable badge of our profession. But it was the *"reproach"* of bringing dishonor upon the name of his God, that David *feared*, and deprecated with most anxious, importunate prayer. The fear of this *reproach* is a practical principle of tender watchfulness and circumspection, and of habitual dependence upon an Almighty upholding power. "Hold me up, and I shall be safe,"—will be the constant supplication of one, that fears the Lord, and fears himself. We do not, perhaps, sufficiently consider the active malice of the enemies of the gospel, "watching for our halting;" else should we be more careful to remove all occasions of *"reproach"* on account of inconsistency of temper or conversation. None, therefore, that feel their own weakness, the continual apprehension of danger, the tendency of their heart to backslide from God, and to disgrace "that worthy name by which they are called," will think this prayer unseasonable or unnecessary, *"Turn away my reproach which I fear."*

Perhaps also the conflicting Christian may find this a suitable prayer. Sometimes Satan has succeeded in beguiling him into some worldly compliance, or weakened his confidence, by tempting him to look to himself for some warrant of acceptance (in all which suggestions he is aided and abetted by his treacherous heart): and then will this "accuser of the brethren" turn back upon him, and change himself "into an angel of light," presenting before him a black catalogue of those very falls, into which he had successfully led him. Bunyan does not fail to enumerate these *"reproaches,"* as among the most harassing assaults of Apollyon. In his desperate conflict with Christian, he taunts him with his fall in the Slough of Despond, and every successive deviation from his path, as blotting out his warrant of present favor with the King, and blasting all hopes of reaching the celestial city. Christian does not attempt to conceal or palliate the charge. He knows it is all true, and much more besides! but he knows that this is true also, "Where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded." "The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanses from all sin." Believers! In the heat of your conflict remember the only effective covering. *"Above all,* taking the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Do you not hate the sins, with which you have been overtaken? Are you not earnestly longing for deliverance from their power? Then, even while the recollections of their guilt and defilement humble you before the Lord, take fresh hold of the gospel, and you shall "overcome by the blood of the Lamb." Victory must come from the cross. And the soul that is directing its eye there for pardon, strength,

and consolation, may sigh out the prayer with acceptance, "*Turn away my reproach which I fear.*"

But how deeply is the guilt of apostasy or backsliding aggravated by the acknowledgment, which all are constrained to make, "*Your judgments are good!*" How affecting is the Lord's admonition with us!, "What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? O My people! what have I done to you, and how have I wearied you? testify against Me. I have not caused you to serve with an offering, nor wearied you with incense." No, surely we have nothing to complain of our Master, of His work, or of His wages: but much, very much, to complain of ourselves, of our unwatchfulness, neglect, backsliding; and to humble ourselves on account of the consequent reproach upon our profession.

Never, however, let us cease to cry, that all *the reproach which we fear* on account of our allowed inconsistencies of profession, may, for the Church's sake, be "*turned away from us.*" Meanwhile, "let us accept it as the punishment of our iniquity;" and, in the recollection of the *goodness of the Lord's judgments*, still venture to hope and look for the best things to come out of it from our gracious Lord.

40. Behold, I have longed after Your precepts; quicken me in Your righteousness.

Behold! An appeal to the heart-searching God, "You know that I love" *Your precepts!* The heartfelt acknowledgment of their *goodness* naturally leads us to *long after them.* The professor *longs after* the promises, and too often builds a delusive—because an unsanctifying—hope upon them. The believer feels it to be his privilege and safety to have an equal regard to both—to obey *the precepts of God* in dependence on His promises, and to expect the accomplishment of the promises, in the way of obedience to *the precepts.* The utmost extent of the professor's service is the heavy yoke of *outward conformity.* He knows nothing of an "*inward delight and longing after them.*" Of many of them his heart complains, "This is a hard saying: who can hear it?" The Christian can give a good reason for his delight even in the most difficult and painful *precepts.* The moments of deepest repentance are his times of sweetest "refreshing from the presence of the Lord." Whatever be the pleasure of indulgence in sin, far greater is the ultimate enjoyment arising out of the mortification of it. Most fruitful is our Savior's *precept,* which inculcates on His followers self-denial and the daily cross. For by this wholesome discipline we lose our own perverse will; the power of sin is restrained, the pride of the heart humbled; and our real happiness fixed upon a solid and permanent basis. So that, whatever dispensation some might desire for breaking the *precept* without forfeiting the promise, the Christian blesses God for the strictness, that binds him to a steady obedience to it. To him it is grievous,

not to keep it, but to break it. A *longing* therefore *after the precepts*, marks the character of the child of God: and may be considered as the pulse of the soul. It forms our fitness and ripeness for heaven.

There are indeed times, when the violence of temptation, or the paralyzing effect of indolence, hides the movements of the "hidden man of the heart." And yet even in these gloomy hours, when the mouth is shut, and the heart dumb, before God, "so troubled, that it cannot speak"—even then, acceptable incense is ascending before the throne of God. We have a powerful intercessor "helping our infirmities"—interpreting our desires, and crying from within, "with groanings that cannot be uttered;" yet such as, being indited by our Advocate within, and presented by our Advocate above, are cheering pledges of their fulfillment. "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him: He also will hear their cry, and will save them."

These *longings* might seem to betoken a vigorous exercise of grace. But shall I be satisfied, while the most fervent desires are so disproportioned to their grand object—so overborne by the corruption of the flesh—and while a heartless state is so hateful to my Savior? Idle confessions and complaints are unseemly and unfruitful. Let me rather besiege the mercy-seat with incessant importunity—'*Quicken me in Your righteousness.*' 'I plead *Your righteousness*—Your righteous promise for the reviving of my spiritual life. I long for more lively apprehensions of Your spotless *righteousness*. Oh! let it invigorate my delight, my obedience, my secret communion, my Christian walk and conversation.' Such *longings*, poured out before the Lord for a fresh supply of *quicken*ing grace, are far different from "the desire of the slothful, which kills him," and will not be forgotten before God. "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart." O for a more enlarged expectation, and a more abundant vouchsafement of blessing; that we may burst forth and break out, as from a living fountain within, in more ardent *longings for the Lord's precepts!*

But it may be asked—What weariness in, and reluctance to duties, may consist with the principle and exercise of grace? Where it is only in the members, not in the mind—where it is only partial, not prevalent—where it is only occasional, not habitual—where it is lamented and resisted, and not allowed—and where, in spite of its influence, the Christian still holds on in the way of duty, "grace reigns" in the midst of conflict, and will ultimately and gloriously triumph over all hindrance and opposition. But in the midst of the humbling views of sin that present themselves on every side, let me diligently inquire—Have I an habitual "hungering and thirsting after *righteousness*?" And since, at the best, I do but get my longings increased, and not satisfied; let the full satisfaction of heaven be much in my heart. "As for me, I will behold Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Your likeness."

And what an expectation is this to pretend to! To think what the infinitely and eternally blessed God is—and what "man is at his best estate," then to conceive

of man—the worm of the dust—the child of sin and wrath—transformed into the likeness of God—how weighty is the sound of this hope! What then must its substantiation be? If the initial privilege be glorious, what will the fullness be! Glory revealed to us! transfused through us! becoming our very being! To have the soul filled—not with evanescent shadows—but with massive, weighty, eternal glory! Worlds are mere empty bubbles, compared with this, our sure, satisfying, unfading inheritance.

41. *Let Your mercies come also to me, O Lord; even Your salvation, according to Your word.*

A prayer of deep anxiety—large desire—simple faith! It is a sinner—feeling his need of mercy—yes, *mercies*—abundant mercy—mercies for every moment—looking for them only in the *Lord's salvation*—to be dispensed *according to His word*. Out of Christ we know only a God, of justice and holiness. In Christ we behold "a just God, and yet a Savior;" and in "His *salvation* mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Therefore general notions of *mercy* without a distinct apprehension of *salvation* have their origin in presumption, not in warranted faith. For can there be any communication of mercy from an unknown God? Can there be any communion with an angry God? "Acquaint now yourself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come to you" "*The Lord's mercies, even His salvation.*"

Can we conceive the moment, when this prayer is not suited to us? How can we be at any moment safe or happy without the spirit of it? To walk as a saved sinner, "accepted in the Beloved," conformed to His image, devoted to His service, sealed for His kingdom—this is, or should be, the sunshine of every day. Let this prayer live in the heart. Carry continually to the Lord the cry for all *His mercies*—specially for that, which is the seal and crown of them all—His *salvation*.

This prayer, however, is peculiarly suitable to the believer, longing to realize that which sometimes is clouded to his view—his personal interest in the *Lord's salvation*! It must *come to me*; or I shall never come to it. I want not a general apprehension—I am not satisfied with the description of it. *Let it come to me—Let Your mercies* be applied, so that I can claim them, and rejoice in them! I see *Your salvation* come to others. Who needs it more than I? *Let it come also to me. "Look upon me, and be merciful to me,* as You do to those that love Your name. *Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that You bear to Your people; O visit me with Your salvation; that I may see the felicity of Your chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance."*

Now, are we seeking the assurance of this *salvation*? Are we waiting to realize its present power, saving us from sin—Satan—the world—ourselves—and "blessing

us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus?" Should a trial of faith and patience be ordained for us, yet in the end we shall find an enriching store of experience from His wise dispensations. That He has kept us from turning our backs upon His ways, when we had no comfort in them; that He has upheld us with His secret supplies of strength—is not this the work of His own Spirit within, and the pledge of the completion of the work? That He has enabled us, against all discouragements, to "continue instant in prayer," is surely an answer to that prayer, which in our apprehensions of it, had been cast out. That in waiting upon Him, we have found no rest in worldly consolation, is an assurance, that the Lord Himself will be our soul-satisfying and eternal portion. And who is there now in the sensible enjoyment of His love, who does not bless that Divine wisdom, which took the same course with them that has been taken with us, to bring them to these joys? When did a weeping seed-time fail of bringing a joyful harvest?

But let not the ground of faith be forgotten—*According to Your word*—that it shall come fully—freely—eternally—to him who waits for it. "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness; those that remember You in Your ways." Many, indeed, are satisfied with far too low a standard of spiritual enjoyments. It is comfortless to live at a distance from our Father's house, when we might be dwelling in the secret of His presence, and rejoicing in the smiles of His love. But let us not charge this dishonorable state upon the sovereignty of the Divine dispensations. Let us rather trace it to its true source—lack of desire—lack of faith—lack of prayer—lack of diligence. What infinite need have we of heavenly influence! What gracious encouragement to seek it! The way was blocked up—mercy has cleared the path, opened our access, "The golden scepter is always held out." Earnest prayer will bring a sure answer. The blessing is unspeakable. *Let Your mercies—Your salvation, come to me, O Lord.*

42. So shall I have with which to answer him who reproaches me; for I trust in Your word.

What is the salvation which he had just been speaking of? The whole gift of the mercy of God—redemption from sin, death, and hell—pardon, peace, and acceptance with a reconciled God—constant communication of spiritual blessings—all that God can give, or we can want; all that we are able to receive here, or heaven can perfect hereafter. Now if this *comes to us*—comes to our hearts—surely it will furnish us at all times with *an answer to him who reproaches us*. The world casts upon us the reproach of the cross. "What profit is there that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?" What is there to counterbalance the relinquishment of pleasure, esteem, and worldly comfort? The mere professor can give no answer. He has heard of it, but it has never *come to Him*. The believer is ready with his *answer*, "I have found in the *Lord's salvation* pardon and peace, "not as the world gives"—and such as the world cannot take away. Here, therefore, do I abide, finding it *my happiness* not to live

without the cross, and testifying in the midst of abounding tribulation, that there are no comforts like Christ's comforts.' This was David's *answer*, when family trials were probably an occasion of *reproach*. "*Although my house be not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire.*"

But there is a far heavier *reproach* than that of the world—when the grand accuser injects hard thoughts of God—when he throws our guilt and unworthiness—our helplessness and difficulties, in our face. And how severe is this exercise in a season of spiritual desertion! Except the believer can stay his soul upon "a God who hides Himself, as still the God of Israel, the Savior," he is unprepared with *an answer to him who reproaches him*. Such appears to have been Job's condition, and Heman's, not to speak of many of the Lord's most favored people, at different stages of their Christian life. Most important, therefore, is it for us to pray for a realizing sense of *the Lord's mercies—even of His salvation*—not only as necessary for our peace and comfort—but to garrison us against every assault, and to enable us to throw down the challenge, "*Rejoice not against me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light to me.*" Free grace has saved me—an unspotted righteousness covers me—an Almighty arm sustains me—eternal glory awaits me. Who shall condemn? "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?"

Now, for this bold front to our enemies, nothing is wanted beyond the reach of the weakest child of God. No extraordinary holiness—no Christian establishment in experience—nothing but simple, humble faith—*For I trust in Your word*. Faith makes this salvation ours, in all its fullness and almighty power: and, therefore, our confidence *in the word* will make us "ready always to give an answer to everyone who asks us a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear." "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that rises against you in judgment, you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of Me, says the Lord."

But how often is our Christian boldness paralyzed by our feeble apprehensions of *the salvation of God!* Clear and full evangelical views are indispensable for the effective exercise of our weighty obligations. Any indistinctness here, from its necessary mixture of self-righteousness and unbelief, obscures the warrant of our personal interest, and therefore hinders the firm grasp of Almighty strength. Coldness and formality also deaden the power of Christian boldness. Much need, therefore, have we to pray for a realized perception of the freeness, fullness, holiness, and privileges of the Gospel. Much need have we to use our speedy diligence, without delay; our painful diligence, without indulgence: our continual diligence, without weariness; that we be not satisfied with remaining on the skirts of the kingdom; that it be not a matter of doubt, whether we belong to it or not; but that, grace being added to grace, "so an entrance may be ministered to us abundantly, into" all its rich consolations and everlasting joys.

43. *And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in Your judgments.*

For the sake of the church and of the world, no less than for our own sakes, let us "give diligence" to clear up our interest in the Gospel. The want of personal assurance is not only a loss in our own souls, but a hindrance to our Christian usefulness. Hence our efforts are often powerless in parrying off the attack of *him that reproaches us*, as well as to "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees" of our brethren. The charge of hypocrisy, or the want of the "constraining" principle of "the love of Christ," stops the utterance of the word of truth, and obscures our character as a "saint of God," and "a witness" for His name. Justly, indeed, might He punish our unfaithfulness, by forbidding us any more to speak in His name. And therefore the dread of this grievous judgment, and the mourning over precious lost opportunities, stirs up the prayer—'*Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth*—Not only take it not *out of my heart*; but let it be ready in my *mouth* for the confession of my Master.'

This valuable prayer may preserve us from denying Christ. Too apt are we to allow worldly communion, habits, and conversation without a word of restraint. Let the whole weight of Christian responsibility be deeply felt—faith in the heart, and confession with the mouth—the active principle, and the practical exercise. Should we be content with the dormant principle, where would be the Church—the witness for God in the world? Shall we shrink from the bold confession of Him, who "despised the shame of the cross" for us? Would not this imply distrust of our own testimony—*the word of truth*?

It does indeed need wisdom to know when, as well as what, to speak. There is "a time to keep silence," and "the prudent shall keep silence in that time." But is it our cross to be "dumb with silence?" And when we "hold our peace, even from good," is our "sorrow stirred—our hearts hot within us—the fire burning"? No—is not the plea of bashfulness or judicious caution often a self-deluding cover for the *real cause* of restraint—the lack of the personal apprehension of the Lord's mercy? "I believed, and therefore have I spoken." Oh! let not the word of truth be taken *utterly* out of our mouth. A stammering confession is better than silence. If we cannot say all we want of, or for our Savior, let us say what we can. 'God's servants are very sensible of the infinite value of the least atom of what belongs to Him.' And a word spoken in weakness may be a word of Almighty power, and a present help to some fainting spirit. In our connection with the world, many occasions will unexpectedly occur, if the heart be but wakeful and active to improve them. The common topics of earthly conversation often furnish a channel for heavenly communion, so that our communications with the world may be like Jacob's ladder, whose bottom rested upon the earth, but the top reached unto the heavens. And oh! what a relief is it to the burdened conscience,

to stammer out, if it be but a few words for God, even though there be no sensible refreshings of His presence! Yet if we would speak for Him with power and acceptance, it must be out of the "good treasure and abundance of the heart." For it is only when "the heart is inditing a good matter, speaking of the things touching the King, that the tongue is as the pen of a ready writer."

But let us take up this petition as the expression of the Christian's exercises with his God. 'That word *utterly*'—observes an eminently-trying believer—'though it seems to be beneath the notice of the mind, when one has got very low, is in reality one of the most blessed words in this most blessed book. How often, when I have formerly been upon the brink of giving up all for lost, and of saying, "Evil, be my good"—the thought has perhaps struck me, that, while I am struggling between despondency and rebellion, and too hard, too cold, too discouraged to look up to Him, the blessed Redeemer is pitying the struggle of my soul; and it has kept me where I was, led me to put off despair at least until tomorrow; and then before tomorrow I have seen something of the grace and glory of the Gospel.'

What then is the advice, which this man of God gives from his own experience? 'When you are most deeply deploring your sins, never fail to thank the Lord, or at least to think how you would thank Him, if you dared lift up a face overwhelmed with shame and defeat, that He has not taken away His truth UTTERLY; that He has left you clinging to some twig of hope, instead of leaving you to end—what thousands who look outwardly very calm—have found—the depth of the precipice of despair.' (Nottidge)

The Psalmist's prayer here is the same confidence of faith, that was expressed in the preceding verse—*For I have hoped in Your judgments*, an acceptable spirit of approach to God, and an earnest of the revival of life and comfort in the Lord's best time and way.

44. *So shall I keep Your law continually forever and ever.*

The heaping up of so many words in this short verse, appears to be the struggle of the soul to express the vehemency of its longings to glorify its Savior. And, indeed, the Lord's return to us, unsealing the lips of the dumb, and putting *His word again into their mouth*, brings with it a fresh sense of constraining obligation. This fresh occupation in His praise and service is not only our present privilege, but an foretaste of our heavenly employment, when the word will never more *be taken out of our mouth*, but we shall "talk of His wondrous works" "*forever and ever.*" The defects in the constancy and extent of our obedience (as far as our hearts are alive to the honor of God) must ever be our grief and burden; and the prospect of its completeness in a better world, is that, which renders the anticipation of heaven so delightful. There we shall be blessed with

suitable feelings, and therefore be enabled to render suitable obedience—even one unbroken consecration of all our powers to His work. Then "*shall we keep His law continually forever and ever.*" Once admitted to the "throne of God," we "shall serve Him day and night in His temple"—without sin—without inconstancy—without weariness—without end! We speak of heaven; but oh! to be there! To be engaged throughout eternity in the service of love to a God of love! In one day's continuance in the path of obedience even here, in the midst of the defilement which stains our holiest services, how sweetly do the moments roll away! But to be ever employed for Him, in that place, where "there shall in no wise enter anything that defiles"—this gives an emphasis and a dignity to the heavenly joy, which may well stamp it as "unspeakable and full of glory." May we not then encourage the hope, that the Lord is making us meet for heaven, by the strength and constancy of our desires *to keep the laws of God?* And is it not evident, that heaven itself can afford no real delight to one, who feels the service of God on earth to be irksome? He stands self-excluded by the constitution of his nature, by the necessity of the case. He has no heart for heaven, no taste for heaven, no capacity for enjoyment of heaven, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he who is holy, let him be holy still."

Heavenly, gracious Father! who and what are we, that our hearts should be made the unworthy recipients of Your grace? that our will should be subdued into "the obedience of faith?" and that we should be permitted to anticipate that blessed period, when we *shall "keep Your law continually, forever and ever?"* May this prospect realize the happiness of our present obedience! May He, who has "bought us with a price" for His glory, reign in our hearts, and live upon our lips; that each of us may have His mark upon our foreheads—the seal of His property in us, and of our obligation to Him, "Whose I am, and whom I serve!"

45. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek Your precepts.

Not only perseverance but *liberty*, is the fruit of the Lord's mercy to our souls—not the liberty of sin—to do what we please—but of holiness—to do what we ought; the one, the iron bondage of our own will; the other, the easy yoke of a God of love. It was a fine expression of a heathen, "To serve God is to reign." Certainly in this service David found the liberty of a king. *The precepts of God* were not forced upon him; for he *sought them*. "More to be desired than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb." The way of the Lord, which to the ungodly is beset with thorns and briers, is the king's highway of *liberty*. The child of God walks here in the gladness of his heart and the rejoicing of his conscience. Even in "*seeking these precepts,*" there is "*liberty*" and enlargement of heart; a natural motion, like that of the sun in its course, "going forth as a bridegroom, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race." What must it be then, to walk in the full enjoyment of *the precepts!* "Where the Spirit of

the Lord is, there is liberty." "They shall sing in the ways of the Lord,"—for "how great is His goodness; how great is His beauty!"

Are we then obeying *the precepts* as our duty, or "*seeking*" them as our privilege? Do we complain of the strictness of the law, or of the corruption of the flesh? Are the *precepts* of our own hearts our burden? Is sin or holiness our bondage? The only way to make religion easy, is to be always in it. The glow of spiritual activity, and the healthfulness of Christian *liberty*, are only to be found in the persevering and self-denying pursuit of every track of the ways of God, "If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed: and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." To have the whole stream of all our thoughts, actions, motives, desires, affections, carried in one undivided current towards God, is the complete and unrestrained influence of His love upon our hearts.

Let but our eyes be opened, our judgments clearly exercised, our consciences suffered to speak; and this point is clear—Sin is slavery—Holiness is liberty. The sinner may live in bonds with as much delight as if he was in his element. He may seem even to himself to be at large, while in fact he is "shut up, and cannot come forth." For such is the tyranny under which he is bound, that he cannot help himself; and (to use the confession of a heathen) while 'he sees and approves better things, he follows the worse.' Every sin is a fresh chain of bondage, under the check of a cruel master. On the other hand—the Lord's commands—as He Himself declares, and all His servants testify—are "for our good always." His 'service is perfect freedom.' (Liturgy.) The life of liberty is to be under the bonds of holy love and duty. Let the trial be made of two Masters; conviction must follow.

True it is, that the corrupt and rebellious inclinations will "lust" to the end. But as long as indulgence is denied, conflict excited, and the constant endeavor maintained to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," our liberty is established, even where it is not always enjoyed. Every fresh chain, by which we bind ourselves to the Lord, makes us more free. While, then, those who "promise us liberty are themselves the servants of corruption," let us live as the children of God—the heirs of the kingdom—grateful—free—blood-bought souls—remembering the infinite cost at which our liberty was purchased, and the moment of extreme peril when we were saved. When the flesh was weak, and the "law weak through the flesh," and no resolution of ours could break us from the yoke of sin—then it was that "Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be the Lord both of the dead and living," "delivering us from the hand of our enemies, that we might serve Him without fear." And then indeed do we "*walk at liberty*," when we "break the bands" of all other lords "asunder," and consecrate ourselves entirely to His precepts. "*O Lord our God, other lords beside You have had dominion over us; but by You only will we make mention of Your name.*"

46. I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.

"Liberty in walking" in the Lord's ways will naturally produce boldness in *speaking* of them. Compare the conduct of the three unshaken witnesses for the truth before the Babylonish monarch. Mark the difference of the spirit displayed by the Apostles, and especially by Peter, before and after the day of Pentecost. Look at Stephen before the council, and Paul before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. "God had not given to them the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Hear the great Apostle testifying of himself, "I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also"—at the metropolis of the world, in the face of all opposition and contempt, and at the imminent hazard of my life, *"For"*—says he, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."* In the same determination of soul, he exhorts his dear son in the faith, *"Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner."* To how many does "the fear of man bring a snare?" Many a good soldier has faced the cannon's mouth with undaunted front, and yet shrunk away with a coward's heart from the reproach of the cross, and been put to blush even by the mention of the Savior's name. Far better—the Son of Man "strengthening you"—to brave the fiery furnace, or the den of lions in His service, than like Jonah, by flinching from the cross, to incur the sting of conscience and the frown of God.

Professing Christians! Are we ready to bear our testimony for Jesus, against the sneer and ridicule of the ungodly? We are not likely to "be brought before kings and rulers for the Son of Man's sake." Yet no less do we need Divine help and strong faith in withstanding the enmity of a prejudiced relative or scornful neighbor. Young people! you are perhaps in especial danger of being ashamed of your Bible, your religion, your Savior. You may be brought under the snare of the "fear of man," and be tempted to compromise your religion, and to sacrifice your everlasting all from a dread of "the reproach of Christ." But remember Him, who for your sake "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;" and shall the dread of a name restrain you from sharing His reproach, and banish the obligations of love and gratitude from your hearts? Have you forgotten, that you once owned the service of Satan? and will you not be as bold for Christ, as you were for him? Were you once "glorying in your shame;" and will you now be ashamed of your glory? Oh! remember who has said, "Whoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." Think much and often of this word. Think on this day. Think on the station of "the fearful and unbelieving" on the left hand on that day. Think on their eternal doom. What is a prison, compared to hell? What need to pray and tremble! If you are sincere in your determination, and simple in your dependence, then will the "love of Christ constrain you," not to a cold, calculating, reluctant service; but to a confession of your Savior, bold, unfettered, and "faithful even unto death." Every deviation from the straight path bears the character of

being *ashamed* of Christ. How much have you to speak in behalf of *His testimonies*, His ways, His love! When in danger of the influence of "the fear of man," look to Him for strength. He will give to you, as He gave to Stephen, "a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist." Thus will you, like them, be strengthened "to profess a good profession before many witnesses."

47. *And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I have loved.*

It is but poor comfort to the believer to be able to talk well to others upon the ways of God, and even to "bear the reproach" of His people, when his own heart is cold, insensible, and dull. But why does he not rouse himself to the active exercise of faith, "*I will delight myself in Your commandments?*" That which is the burden of the carnal heart is the delight of the renewed soul. The former "is enmity against God: and therefore is not, and cannot be, subject to His law." The latter can *delight* in nothing else. If the gospel separates the heart from *sinful* delights, it is only to make room for delights of a more elevated, satisfying, and enduring nature. Satan, indeed, generally baits his temptations with that seductive witchery, which the world calls pleasure. But has he engrossed all pleasure into his service? Are there no pleasures besides "the pleasures of sin?" Do the ways of the Lord promise nothing but difficulty and trial? What means then the experience of him, who could "rejoice in them, as much as in all riches," and who "loved them above gold, yes, above fine gold?" The "fatted calf" of our Father's house is surely a most gainful exchange for "the husks" of the "far country." The delights of holiness go deeper than sensual pleasures. The joy of the saint is not that false, polluted, deadly joy, which is all that the worldling knows, and all that he has to look for: but it flows spontaneously from the fountain of living waters, through the pure channel of "the word of God, which lives and abides forever." No, so independent is it of any earthly spring, that it never flourishes more than in the desolate wilderness, or the sick-bed solitude; so that, "although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our salvation." Men of the world see what religion takes away, but they see little of what it gives; else would they reproach—not our folly—but their own blindness. "Thus says the Lord God, Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, My servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, My servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed; behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit." The love and delight of the soul first fixes on *the commandments*. Then how natural is the flow of *delight in them!* even at the very time that we are "abhorring ourselves in dust and ashes" for our neglect of them; and God never has our hearts, until something of this delight is felt and enjoyed. But do we complain of the dullness of our hearts, that restrains this pleasure? Let us seek for a deeper impression of redeeming love. This will be the spring of grateful obedience and holy delight. Let us turn our

complaints into prayers, and the Lord will quickly turn them into praises. Let us watch against everything, that would intercept our communion with Jesus. Distance from Him must be accompanied with poverty of spiritual enjoyment., *"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Your house: and You shall make them drink of the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life: and in Your light shall we see light."*

48. *My hands also will I lift up unto Your commandments, which I have loved: and I will meditate in Your statutes.*

David seems at a loss for expressions adequately to set forth the fervency of his love and delight in the ways and word of God. Here we find him *lifting up his hands* with the gesture of one, who is longing to embrace the object of his desire with both hands and his whole heart. Perhaps also in *lifting up his hands unto the commandments*, he might mean to express his looking upward for assistance to keep them, and to live in them. But how humbling this comparison with ourselves! Alas! how often from the neglect of this influence of the Spirit of God, do our "hands hang down," instead of being *lifted up*, in these holy ways! We are too often content with a scanty measure of love: without any sensible "hungering and thirsting after righteousness;" neither able to pray with life and power, nor to hear with comfort and profit, nor to "do good and communicate" with cheerfulness, nor to meditate with spiritual delight, nor to live for God with zeal and interest, nor to anticipate the endurance of the cross with unflinching resolution—the soul being equally disabled for heavenly communion and active devotedness. Shall we look for ease under the power of this deadening malady? Let us rather struggle and cry for deliverance from it. Let us subscribe ourselves before God as wretched, helpless, and guilty. He can look upon us, and revive us. Let us then "take hold upon His covenant," and plead that He will look upon us. Let us "put Him in remembrance" of the glory of His name, which is much more concerned in delivering us out of this frame, by His quickening grace, than in leaving us, stupid, corrupt, and carnal in it. Professor! awake: or beg of the Lord to awaken you! For if your cold sleeping heart is contented with the prospect of a heaven hereafter, without seeking for a present foretaste of its joy, it may be a very questionable matter whether heaven will ever be yours.

Delight, however, will exercise itself in an habitual *meditation in the statutes*. The breathing of the heart will be, *"Oh, how love I Your law! it is my meditation all the day."* It is in holy meditation on the word of God, that all the graces of the Spirit are manifested. What is the principle of faith, but the reliance of the soul upon the promises of the word? What is the sensation of godly fear, but the soul trembling before the threatenings of God? What is the object of hope, but the apprehended glory of God? What is the excitement of desire or love, but longing, endearing contemplations of the Savior, and of His unspeakable blessings? Hence we can scarcely conceive of the influence of grace separated from spiritual meditation on

the word. It is this which, under Divine teaching, draws out its hidden contents, and exhibits them to the soul, as the objects upon which the principles and affections of the Divine life are habitually exercised. Not that any benefit can be expected from meditation, even upon the word of God, as an abstract duty. If not deeply imbued with prayer, it will degenerate into dry speculative study. Without some distinct practical application, it will be unedifying in itself, and unsatisfactory for its important ends—the discerning of the mind of God, and feeding upon the rich provision of the Gospel.

Why then is the Bible read only—not *meditated* on? Because it is not *loved*. We do not go to it, as the hungry man to his food, as the miser to his treasure. The loss is incalculable. Our superficial knowledge has no practical influence. It is only as we "search," that we "know it for our good."

Let it then be a matter of daily inquiry. Does my reading of the word of God furnish food for my soul, matter for prayer, direction for conduct? Scriptural study, when entered upon in a prayerful spirit, will never, like many other studies, be unproductive. The mind that is engaged in it, is fitly set for bearing fruit; it will "bring forth fruit in due season." Meditation kindles love, as it is the effect of love, "While I was musing, the fire burned." "Whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues in it, this man is blessed in his deed." But let us take heed, that the root of religion in the soul is not cankered by the indulgence of secret sin. The largest supply of Christian ordinances will fail to refresh us, except the heart be kept right with God in simplicity of faith, love, and diligence in the service of Christ.

Come then, Christian, let us set our hearts to a vigorous, delighting devotedness to *the statutes of our God*. "It is not a vain thing for us; because it is our life." But to regard *some* of the words only would be to obey our own will, not God's. Let us *lift up our hands to them all*. How shadowy is the joy of speculative contemplation, if it does not draw the heart to practical exercise! Let faith return our obligations in the full apprehension of the Lord's mercy. And then will love constrain us to nothing less than "a living sacrifice" to His service. If the professor sleeps in notional godliness, let us employ our active *meditation* in searching for the mine that lies not on the surface, but which never fails to enrich diligent, patient, persevering labor.

49. Remember the word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope.

What is faith? It is *hope upon God's word*. The warrant of faith is therefore *the word*. The object of faith is He who *causes us to hope*. He has not forgotten—He cannot forget, His *word*. But He permits—no, commands *His servants* to remind Him of it in order to exercise their faith, diligence, and patience. Often, indeed,

"*hope deferred makes the heart sick.*" But it is not needless delay—not ignorance of the fittest time—not forgetfulness—not changeableness—not weakness. Meanwhile, however, constantly plead the promise—*Remember the word unto Your servant.* This is the proper use of the promises, as "arguments with which to fill our mouths, when we order our cause before God." When thus pleaded with the earnestness and humility of faith, they will be found to be the blessed realities of unchanging love.

Now—have not circumstances of Providence, or the distinct application of the Spirit, made some words of God especially precious to your soul? Such words are thus made your own, to be laid up against some future time of trial, when you may "put your God in remembrance" of them. Apply this exercise of faith to such a word as this, "Him who comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out." Then plead your interest in it as a coming sinner, "Lord, *I hope in this Your word.*" "*You have caused me to hope*" in it. "*Remember this word unto Your servant.*" Thus is prayer grounded upon the promise, which it forms into a prevailing argument, and sends back to heaven; nothing doubting, but that it will be verified in God's best time and way.

Take another case; God has engaged Himself to be the God of the seed of believers. His sacramental ordinance is the seal of this promise. The believer brings his child to this ordinance, as the exercise of his faith upon the faithfulness of God. Let him daily put his finger upon this promise, *Remember the word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope.* This is, as Augustine said of his mother, 'bringing before God His own handwriting.' Will He not *remember His word?* Faith may be tried, perhaps long tried. "But He abides faithful. He cannot deny Himself." Faith trusts—not what the eye sees, but what the word promises.

Again—Have we ever found *God's word hoped on*, a covering and strength against besetting sin? This will surely be an encouragement to cry under the same temptation—*Remember Your word.* "He who has delivered, does deliver, and will even to the end deliver." He "has done great things for us." And is not this an earnest of continued mercy? "*Because You have been my help*, therefore under the shadow of Your wings will I rejoice." Thus may we confidently receive a promise as the distinct message to our soul, when we are conscious of a readiness to receive the whole word as the rule of our life. And does it not set an edge upon prayer, *to eye a promising God*, and to consider His promises—not as hanging in the air, without any definite direction or meaning, but as individually spoken and belonging to myself as a child and *servant of God?* This is the experience and comfort of the life of faith. This unfolds the true secret of living to God; ending at last with the honorable death-bed testimony, "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing has failed of all the good things, which the Lord your God spoke concerning you; all have come to pass to you; and not one thing has failed thereof."

50. *This is my comfort in my affliction; for Your word has quickened me.*

David was encouraged to plead *the word* of promise in prayer, from the recollection of its *comfort in his affliction*. For the man of God is not exempted from affliction, but he is comforted in it with God's comforts, flowing from the fountain-head. And truly no comforts are like God's comforts, and there are none beside His. They are indeed strong consolations, both in their foundation and their influence; supporting—not only in the prospect, but under the actual pressure of trouble, and fully proportioned to the need of the most sinking calamity. Never therefore are we left unsupported in such a time, or called to drink a cup of unmingled tribulation. In the moments of our bitterest sorrow, how are we compelled to stand amazed at the tenderness, which is daily and hourly exercised towards us! We have always some word exactly suited to our affliction, and which we could not have understood without it; and "a word" *thus "spoken* in due season, how good is it!" One word of God, sealed to the heart, infuses more sensible relief, than ten thousand words of man. When therefore *the word* assures of the presence of God in *affliction*; of His continued pity and sympathy in His most severe dispensations; and of their certain issue to our everlasting good; must not we say of it, *This is our comfort in our affliction?* How does the Savior's love stream forth from this channel on every side; imparting life, refreshment, strength to those, who but for this *comfort* would have "fainted," and "perished in their affliction!" This indeed was the end, for which the Scriptures were written; and such power of consolation have they sometimes administered to the afflicted saint, that tribulation has almost ceased to be a trial, and the retrospect has been the source of thankful recollection.

But first the word becomes life—then *comfort*. And *those only*, who have felt the *quickening power of the word*, can realize its consolations. Be thankful, then, Reader, if, when dead in sins, it "*quickened you;*" and, when sunk in trouble, once and again it has revived you. Yet do not think, that it is any innate power of its own, that works so graciously for you. No. The exhibition of the Savior is the spring of life and consolation. It is because it "testifies of Him," "the consolation of Israel" "afflicted in all our afflictions"—and never failing to uphold with "grace sufficient for us." It is not, however, the word without the Spirit, nor the Spirit generally without the word; but the Spirit by the word—first putting life into the word, and then by the word quickening the soul. The word then is only the instrument. The Spirit is the Almighty agent. Thus the work is the Lord's; and nothing is left for us, but self-renunciation and praise.

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