

## Exposition of Psalm 119

Verses 51-75

By [Charles Bridges](#)

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### **51. The proud have had me greatly in derision; yet have I not declined from Your law.**

The scorn of an ungodly world is one of the afflictions, which realize to us the comfort of the word. And this is a trial, from which no exemption is to be expected, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Not even David—though a king—a man of wisdom and prudence, and therefore not likely to give unnecessary offence; and whose character and rank might be expected to command respect—not even was he shielded from the derision of the proud on account of the profession and service of his God. Thus it ever was and ever will be. Faith in the doctrine of Christ, and conformity to the strict commandments of the gospel, must expose us to the taunts of the unbeliever and the worldling. Yet, where the heart is right with God, the derision of the proud, instead of forcing us to decline from the law of God, will strengthen our adherence to it. David answered the bitter derision of Michal with a stronger resolution to abide by his God, "I will yet be more vile than thus." He counted it his glory, his duty, his joy. None, however, but a believer knows what it is to bear this cross: and none but a real believer can bear it. It is one of the touchstones of sincerity, the application of which has often been the means of "separating the precious from the vile," and has unmasked the self-confident professor to his own confusion. Oh! how many make a fair profession, and appear "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," until the hour of danger proves them deserters, and they reap only the fruits of their self-confidence in their own confusion!

It is, therefore, of great importance to those who are just setting out in the warfare, to be well armed with the word of God. It kept David steadfast amid the derision of the proud; and it will keep young Christians from being frightened or overcome by the sneer of an ungodly world. But that it may "dwell in us richly in all wisdom," and be suited to our own case, it will be well, under circumstances of reproach, to acquaint ourselves with the supporting promises and encouragements to suffer for righteousness' sake. Above all, the contemplation of the great sufferer Himself—meeting this poignant trial in meekness, compassion, and prayer—will exhibit "a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as the storm against the

wall." The mere professor knows not this refuge; he possesses not this armor; so that when "affliction or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately he is offended."

Christian! be satisfied with the approbation of your God. Has He not adopted you into His family, stamped you with His image, assured you by His Spirit, sealed you for His kingdom? And is not this "honor that comes from God only" enough—far more than enough—to counterbalance the derision of the proud? Think of the day, when "the rebuke of the people shall be taken away from off all the earth," when "he will confess their name before His Father, and before His angels," when "the saints shall judge the world," when "the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning." Can we be Christians, if this sure prospect does not infinitely more than compensate for all "the hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against us?"

Thus—blessed be God—the weapons of our warfare are drawn from the Divine armory; and therefore depending on the grace, and following the example, of Jesus, we suffer, as the way to victory—the road to an everlasting crown.

## **52. I remembered Your judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself.**

The Lord's dealings with His people were a frequent subject of meditation to the Psalmist, and now were they his present support under "the scourge of the tongue." Evidently they are put upon record for the encouragement of future generations. We are ready to imagine something peculiar in our own case, and to "think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us, as though some strange thing happened unto us." But when we remember the Lord's judgments of old, with His people, we comfort ourselves in the assurance, that "the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren, that have been in the world;" and that "as the sufferings of Christ have abounded in them, so their consolation also abounded by Christ." They also encountered the same derision of the proud, and always experienced the same support from the faithfulness of their God. We do not sufficiently consider the mercy and gracious wisdom of God, in occupying so much of His written word with the records of His judgments of old. One class will pay a prominent attention to the preceptive, another to the doctrinal, parts of revelation—each forgetting that the historical records comprise a full and striking illustration of both, and have always proved most supporting grounds of consolation to the Lord's people. The important design in casting so large a portion of the small volume of Revelation into an historical form, is every way worthy of its author. "Whatever things were written before, were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope;" and how admirably adapted the means are to the end, the diligent student in the Scripture field will bear ample witness. Willfully, therefore, to neglect the historical portion of the sacred volume, from the idea of confining our attention to

what we deem the more spiritual parts of scripture—would show a sad deficiency of spiritual apprehension, and deprive ourselves of the most valuable instruction, and most abundant comfort. This neglect would exclude us from one eminent means of increasing "patience," in the example of those "who through faith and patience inherit the promises;" of receiving "comfort," in the experience of the faithfulness of God manifested in every age to His people: and of enlivening our "hope," in marking the happy issue of the "patience of the saints," and the heavenly support administered unto them. So far, therefore, are we from being little interested in the Scriptural records of past ages, that it is evident that the sacred historians, as well as the prophets, "ministered not unto themselves, but unto us the things which are now reported."

Let us select one or two instances as illustrative of this subject. Why were the records of the deluge, and of the overthrow of the cities of the plain, preserved, but as exhibitions to the church, that "the Lord"—the Savior of Noah, the eighth person, and the deliverer of just Lot, "knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished?" What a source of comfort then to the tempted people of God is the remembrance of these judgments of old! Take again the wonderful history of the overthrow of the Egyptians, and the consequent deliverance of God's ancient people. How often does the church recollect this interposition as a ground of assurance, that under similar circumstances of trial, the same illustrious displays of Divine faithfulness and love may be confidently expected! She looks back upon what the "arm of the Lord has done in ancient days, and in the generation of old," as the pattern of what He ever would be, and ever would do, for His purchased people. Thus also God Himself recalls to our mind this overthrow and deliverance as a ground of present encouragement and support, "According to the days of your coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvelous things"—and the Church echoes back this remembrance in the expression of her faith, gratitude, and expectation for spiritual blessings: "He will subdue our iniquities, and You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Such is the interesting use that may be made of the historical parts of Scripture! Such is the comfort to be derived from the remembrance of the Lord's judgments of old! And is not the recollection of His judgments of old with ourselves, productive of the same support? Does not the retrospect of His dealings with our own souls serve to convince us, that "all His paths are mercy and truth?" The assurance is therefore warranted alike by experience and by Scripture, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

### **53. Horror has taken hold upon me, because of the wicked that forsake Your law.**

The remembrance of the Lord's judgments of old, while it brings comfort to His people as regards themselves, stirs up a poignancy of compassionate feeling for the ungodly. And indeed to a feeling and reflecting mind, the condition of the

world must excite commiseration and concern! A "whole world lying in wickedness!" lying therefore in ruins! the image of God effaced! the presence of God departed! Horror has taken hold of me! to see the law of Him, who gave being to the world, so utterly forsaken! so much light and love shining from heaven in vain! The earthly heart cannot endure that any restraint should be imposed; much less that any constraint, even of love, should be employed to change its bias, and turn it back to its God. Are you then a believer? then you will be most tender of the honor of the law of God. Every stroke at His law you will feel as a stroke at your own heart. Are you a believer? then will you consider every man as your brother; and weep to see so many of them around you, crowding the broad road to destruction, and perishing as the miserable victims of their own deceivings. The prospect on every side is, as if God were cast down from His throne, and the creatures of His hand were murdering their own souls.

But how invariably does a languor respecting our own eternal interest affect the tenderness of our regard for the honor of our God; so that we can look at the wicked that forsake God's law, with comparative indifference! Awful indeed is the thought, that it ever can be with us a small matter, that multitudes are sinking! going down into perdition! with the name of Christ—under the seal of baptism—partakers of the means of gospel grace—yet perishing! Not, indeed, that we are to yield to such a feeling of horror, as would paralyze all exertion on their behalf. For do we owe them no duty—no prayer—no labor? Shall we look upon souls hurrying on with such dreadful haste to unutterable, everlasting torments; and permit them to rush on blinded, unawakened, unalarmed! If there is a horror to see a brand apparently fitting for the fire, will there not be a wrestling endeavor to pluck that brand out of the fire? Have we quite forgotten in our own case the fearful terrors of an unconverted state—the Almighty power of wrath and justice armed against us—the thunder of that voice, "Vengeance belongs to Me, I will recompense, says the Lord?" Oh! if the love of the Savior and the love of souls were reigning with more mighty influence in our hearts, how much more devoted should we be in our little spheres of labor! how much more enlarged in our supplications, until all the kingdom of Satan were subject to the obedience of the Son of God, and conquered by the force of His omnipotent love!

But if the spirit of David, renewed but in part, was thus filled with horror in the contemplation of the wicked, what must have been the affliction—what the intensity of His sufferings, "who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"—yes, "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity"—during thirty-three years of continued contact with a world of sin! What shall we say of the condescension of His love, in wearing "the likeness of sinful flesh"—dwelling among sinners—yes, "receiving sinners, and eating with them!"

Blessed Spirit! impart to us more of "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," that the law of God may be increasingly precious in our eyes, and that we may be "exceedingly jealous for the Lord God of Hosts!" Help us by Your gracious influence to plead with sinners for God, and to plead for sinners with God!

#### **54. Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.**

Come, Christian pilgrim, and beguile your wearisome journey heavenward by "singing the Lord's song in this strange land." With the statutes of God in your hand and in your heart, you are furnished with a song for every step of your way, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." How delightfully does this song bring before you Him, who having laid down His life for you, engages Himself as your Provider, your Keeper, your Guide, your faithful and unchangeable Friend! Such a song, therefore, will smooth your path, and reconcile you to the many inconveniences of the way; while the recollection that this is only the house of your pilgrimage and not your home; and that "there remains a rest for the people of God," will support the exercise of faith and patience to the end. How striking the contrast between the wicked that forsake the law, and the Christian pilgrim, who makes it the subject of his daily song, and the source of his daily comfort! Yes, these same statutes, which are the yoke and burden of the ungodly, lead the true servant of the Lord from pleasure to pleasure; and, cherished by their vigorous influence, his way is made easy and prosperous. Evidently, therefore, our knowledge and delight in the Lord's statutes will furnish a decisive test of our real state before Him.

But it is important to remember that our cheerful song is connected with a pilgrim-spirit. Never forget that we are not at home; only happy strangers on our passage homewards. Here we have no settled habitation—no rest. We are looking for a better country: and as we look, we are seeking for it. Our "hearts are in the ways of it." Every day advances us nearer to it. In this spirit the statutes of the Lord will be our song. Here are the deeds of conveyance—our title made sure to an estate—not small, of little account, or of uncertain interest—but "an inheritance" of incalculable value, made over to us. Here we have sure direction—such as cannot mislead us—for the attainment of it. Here we are stimulated by the examples of our fellow-pilgrims, who have reached their home; and as we follow their track, many are the cordials by the way, and home brightens in the nearer prospect.

What reason have we then every moment to guard against the debasing, stupifying influence of the world, which makes us forget the proper character of a pilgrim! And what an habitual conflict must be maintained with the sloth and aversion of a reluctant heart to maintain our progress in the journey towards Zion! Reader! have you entered upon a pilgrim's life? Then what is your solace

and refreshment on the road? It is dull, heavy, wearisome, to be a pilgrim without a song. And yet it is only the blessed experience of the Lord's statutes, that will tune our song. "If therefore you have tasted that the Lord is gracious;" if He has thus "put a new song into your mouth," oh! do not permit any carelessness or neglect to rob you of this heavenly anticipation. And that your lips be not found mute, seek to maintain a lively contemplation of the place where you are going—of Him who as your "forerunner is for you entered" there—and of the prospect, that, having "prepared a place for you, He will come again, and take you to Himself; that where He is, there you may be also." In this spirit, and with these hopes before you, you may take up your song, "O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. I will bless the Lord at all times—His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Thus may you go on your pilgrimage "singing in the ways of the Lord," and commencing a song below, which in the world of praise above, shall never, never cease.

### **55. I have remembered Your name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept Your law.**

How did this man of God live in the statutes of God! In the day they were his pilgrim song—in the night his happy meditation. And, truly, if we can ever spend the waking moments of the night with God, "the darkness is no darkness with us, but the night shines as the day." Many a tried believer has found this cordial for the restlessness of a wakeful night more restorative to the quiet and health of his earthly frame, than the most sovereign specifics of the medical world. "So He gives His beloved sleep." And if in any night of affliction we feel the hand of the Lord grievous to us, do we not find in the remembrance of the Lord a never-failing support? What does our darkness arise from, but from our forgetfulness of God, blotting out for a while the lively impressions of His tender care, His unchanging faithfulness, and His mysterious methods of working His gracious will? And to bring up as it were from the grave, the remembrance of God's name, as manifested in His promises, and in the dispensation of His love; this is indeed the "light that is sown for the righteous," and which "springs up out of darkness." It is to eye the character of the Lord as All-wise to appoint, Almighty to secure, All-compassionate to sympathize and support. It is to recollect Him as a "father pitying his children;" as a "friend who loves at all times," and who "sticks closer than a brother." And even in those seasons of depression, when unwatchfulness or indulgence of sin have brought the darkness of night upon the soul, though the remembrance of the name of the Lord may be grievous, yet it opens the way to consolation. It tells us, that there is a way made for our return; that "the Lord waits, that He may be gracious;" and that in the first step of our return to our Father, we shall find Him full of mercy to his backsliding children. Thus, though "weeping may endure for a night, joy comes in the morning."

Study the Lord's revelation of His own name; and what more full perception can we conceive of its support in the darkest midnight of tribulations? "And the Lord

descended in the cloud, and stood with him (Moses), and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed—The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." Can we wonder that such a name as this should be exhibited as a ground of trust? "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runs into it and is safe." "Those who know Your name will put their trust in You." Even our suffering Lord appears to have derived support from the remembrance of the name of the Lord in the night of desertion, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, and You do not hear; and in the night-season, and am not silent. But You are holy, O You who inhabits the praises of Israel!" And from the experience of this source of consolation, we find the tempted Savior directing His tempted people to the same support, "Who is among you who fears the Lord, who obeys the voice of His servant, who walks in darkness, and has no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

The main principles of the Gospel are involved in this remembrance of the Lord's name. Memory is the storehouse, in which the substance of our knowledge is treasured up. Recollections without faith are shadowy notions. But we have confidence that our God in Himself—and as engaged to us—is all that the Bible declares Him to be. How vast then are our obligations to His dear Son—the only medium, by which His name could be known or remembered, "who has" so "declared Him!" And here is the spring of practical religion. We shall keep His law when we remember His name. A sense of our obligations will impel us forward in diligence, heavenly-mindedness, and self-devotedness in our appointed sphere. Obedience will partake far more of the character of privilege than of duty, when an enlightened knowledge of God is the principle of action.

#### **56. This I had, because I kept Your precepts.**

How is it, believer, that you are enabled to sing of the Lord's statutes—and to remember His name? This you have, because you keep His precepts. Thus you are able to tell the world, that in keeping His "commandments there is great reward"—that the "work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance forever." Christian! let your testimony be clear and decided—that ten thousand worlds cannot bestow the happiness of one day's devotedness to the service of your Lord. For is it not in this path that you realize fullness of joy in "fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ?" "He that has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me; and he who loves Me shall be loved of My Father; and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him—My Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." If you were walking more closely with God in "the obedience of faith," the world would never dare to accuse religion as the source of melancholy and despondency. No man has any right to the hope of happiness in a world of tribulation, but he who seeks it in the favor of his God. Nor can any

enjoy this favor, except as connected, in the exercise of faith, with conformity to the will, and delight in the law, of his God. Thus not only are the "statutes of the Lord right," but they "rejoice the heart." There is a sweetness and satisfaction in the work, as well as a good flowing out of it—a current as well as a consequent privilege—cheering the soul in the act of exercise, just as the senses are regaled at the very instant with the object of their gratification.

But let us remark how continually David was enriching his treasury of spiritual experience with some fresh view of the dealings of God with his soul: some answer to prayer, or some increase of consolation, which he records for his own encouragement, and for the use of the Church of God. Let us seek to imitate him in this respect; and we shall often be enabled to say as he does—This I had—this comfort I enjoyed—this support in trouble—this remarkable manifestation of His love—this confidence I was enabled to maintain—it was made my own, because I kept Your precepts.

This I had—not, this I hoped for. He speaks of "the promise of the life that now is"—that by which God clears away the charge, "It is vain to serve Him; and what profit is it, that we have kept His ordinances?" Nor is it any boasting of merit, but only an acknowledgment of the gracious dispensation of his God. Such a reward for such poor service, can only be undeserved "mercy," having respect, not to the worthiness of the work, but to the faithfulness of the promise. Perfect keeping, according to the legal requirements, there cannot be. Evangelical perfection, in aiming at the mark, and constantly pressing onward towards it, there may be.

How important therefore is it—in the absence of this Christian confidence—to examine, "Is there not a cause?" and what is the cause? Have not "strangers devoured my strength; and I knew it not?" Is the Lord "with me as in months past?"—with me in my closet?—with me in my family?—with me at my table?—with me in my daily employments and conversation with the world? When I hear the faithful people of God telling of His love, and saying—This I had; must I not, if unable to join their cheerful acknowledgment, trace it to my unfaithful walk, and say—This I had not, because I have failed in obedience to Your precepts; because I have been careless and self-indulgent; because I have slighted Your love; because I have "grieved Your Holy Spirit," and forgotten to ask for the "old paths, that I might walk therein, and find rest to my soul?" O let this scrutiny and recollection of our ways realize the constant need of the finished work of Jesus, as our ground of acceptance, and source of strength. This will bring healing, restoration, increasing devotedness, tenderness of conscience, circumspection of walk, and a determination not to rest, until we can make this grateful acknowledgment our own. At the same time, instead of boasting that our own arm, our own diligence, or holiness, "have gotten us" into this favor, we shall cast all our attainments at the feet of Jesus, and crown Him Lord of all forever.

**57. You are my portion, O Lord; I have said that I would keep Your words.**



Man, as a dependent being, must be possessed of some portion. He cannot live upon himself. It must, however, be not only good, but his own good—something that he may lay claim to as his own. It must also be a large portion, because the powers and capacities to be filled are large. If he has not a satisfying portion, he is a wretched empty creature. But where and how shall he find this portion?

"There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord! lift up the light of Your countenance upon us." And then the goodness of the Lord, in having offered Himself as the portion of an unworthy sinner! So that we can now lay claim to Him, as having wholly and fully made Himself over to us, and having engaged to employ His perfections for our happiness! "I will be your God." Surely every good is centered in the chief good—the fountain of all blessings, temporal, spiritual, eternal. What, then, is the folly, madness, and guilt, of the sinner, in choosing his "portion in this life:" as if there were no God on the earth, no way of access to Him, or no happiness to be found in Him? That such madness should be found in the heart of man, is a most affecting illustration of his departure from God. But that God's own "people should commit these two evils—forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out for themselves broken cisterns"—this is the fearful astonishment of heaven itself.

But we cannot know and enjoy God as our portion, except as He has manifested Himself in His dear Son. And in the knowledge and enjoyment of Him, can we envy those who "in their lifetime receive their good things," and therefore have nothing more to expect? Never, indeed, does the poverty of the worldling's portion appear more striking, than when contrasted with the enjoyment of the child of God, "Soul"—said the rich fool, "you have much goods laid up for many years." But God said, "This night your soul shall be required of you." Augustine's prayer was, "Lord, give me Yourself!" And thus the believer exults, "Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none upon earth that I desire but You. Return unto your rest, O my soul. The Lord Himself is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup. You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who has given me counsel."

Elsewhere the believer makes this confession to himself, "The Lord is my portion—says my soul." Here, as if to prove his sincerity, he "lifts up his face unto God." "You are my portion, O Lord." And surely the whole world cannot weigh against the comfort of this Christian confidence. For it is as impossible, that His own people should ever be impoverished, as that His own perfections should molder away. But a portion implies, not a source of ordinary pleasure, but of rest and satisfaction, such as leaves nothing else to be desired. Thus the Lord can never be enjoyed, even by His own children—except as a portion—not only above all, but in the place of all. Other objects indeed may be subordinately loved: but of none but Himself must we say, "He is altogether lovely." "In all things He must have the preeminence"—one with the Father in our affections, as in His own subsistence. The moment that any rival is allowed to usurp the throne of the heart, we open the door to disappointment and unsatisfied desires.

But if we take the Lord as our portion, we must take Him as our king. I have said—this is my deliberate resolution—that I would keep Your words. Here is the Christian complete—taking the Lord as his portion, and His word as his rule. And what energy for holy devotedness flows from the enjoyment of this our heavenly portion! Thus delighting ourselves in the Lord, He gives us our heart's desire; and every desire identifies itself with His service. All that we are and all that we have, are His; cheerfully surrendered as His right, and willingly employed in his work. Thus do we evidence our interest in His salvation; for "Christ became the author of eternal salvation unto all those who obey Him."

Reader! inquire—was my choice of this Divine portion considerate, free, unreserved? Am I resolved that it shall be steadfast and abiding? that death itself shall not separate me from the enjoyment of it? Am I ready to receive a Sovereign as well as a Savior? Oh! let me have a whole Christ for my portion! Oh! let Him have a whole heart for His possession. Oh! let me call nothing mine but Him.

The heart touched with the loadstone of Divine love: trembling with godly fear, yet still looking towards God by fixed believing—points at the love of election. He who loves may be sure he was loved first. He who chooses God in Christ for his delight and portion, may conclude confidently, that God has chosen him to enjoy Him, and be happy in Him forever.  
(Leighton)

**58. I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; be merciful unto me according to Your word.**

Delight in the Lord as our portion, naturally leads us to entreat His favor as "life," and "better than life," to our souls. And if we have said that we would keep His words, we shall still entreat His favor—to strengthen and encourage us in His way. We shall entreat it with our whole hearts, as though we felt our infinite need of it, and were determined to wrestle for it in Jacob's spirit, "I will not let You go, except You bless me." If we have known what unspeakable happiness it is to be brought into the favor of God "by the blood of Christ;" and if by "Him also we have access unto that grace wherein we stand," how shall we prize the sense of Divine favor, the light of our Father's countenance! We shall never be weary of this source of daily enjoyment. It is to us as the light of the sun, which shines every day with renewed and unabated pleasure. We "joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." Mercy, however, is the source of that favor which we entreat; and the word is the warrant of our expectation—Be merciful to us according to Your word. As sinners, we need this favor. As believers, we entreat it in the assurance that praying breath, as the breath of faith, will not be spent in vain. Any indulged indolence, or neglect, or unfaithfulness—relaxing our diligence, and keeping back the whole

heart from God—will, indeed, never fail to remove the sunshine from the soul. But the blood of Christ still opens the way of return to the backslider, even though he may have wandered, as it were, to the ends of the earth. For "if from thence you shall seek the Lord your God, you shall find Him, if you seek Him with all your heart and all your soul." "A whole heart" in seeking the Lord, is the seal of the Lord's heart in returning to us, "I will rejoice over them"—says He, "to do them good; and I will plant them in this land assuredly, with my whole heart, and with my whole soul."

Reader! if you are a child of God, the favor of God will be to you the "one thing needful." In other things, you will not venture to choose for yourself; "for who knows what is good for man in this life?" But in this choice you will be decided. This grand, incomparable desire will fill your heart. This will be to you as the portion of ten thousand worlds. Nothing will satisfy besides.

You may, indeed, be a child of God without the enjoyment of the blessing; but not so, if you be content to be without it. If the wise sovereignty of our God is pleased to withhold it, still the child in submission will entreat it. Much more, when it is withdrawn in righteous chastening of carelessness or folly, will the cry be reiterated upon the ground of the covenant—Be merciful to me according to Your word.

### **59. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies.**

The Psalmist's determination, lately mentioned, to keep God's word, was not a hasty impulse, but a considerate resolve, the result of much thinking on his former ways of sin and folly. How many, on the other hand, seem to pass through the world into eternity without a serious thought on their ways! Multitudes live for the world—forget God and die! This is their history. What their state is, is written as with a sunbeam in the word of truth, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." When "no man repents him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?"—this banishing of reflection is the character and ruin of an unthinking world. Perhaps one serious thought might be the new birth of the soul to God—the first step of the way to heaven. For when a man is arrested by the power of grace, he is as one awaking out of sleep, lost in solemn and serious thoughts—'What am I? where am I? what have I been? what have I been doing? I have a soul, which is my everlasting all—yet a soul without a Savior—lost—undone. What is my prospect for its happiness? Behind me is a world of vanity, an empty void. Before me a fearful unknown eternity. Within me an awakened conscience, to remind me of an angry God, and a devouring hell. If I stay here, I perish; if I go forward, I perish; if I return home to my offended Father, I can but perish.' The resolution is formed; "I will arise," and fight my way through all difficulties and discouragements to my Father's house.' Thus does every prodigal child of God "come to himself;" and this his first step of return to his God involves the whole work of repentance. The wanderer thinks on his ways, and turns his

feet to the testimonies of his God; witnessing, to his joyful surprise, every hindrance removed, the way marked with the blood of his Savior, and his Father's smiles in this way welcoming his return homeward. This turn is the practical exercise of a genuine faith; and "because he considers, and turns away from all his transgressions that he has committed, he shall surely live—he shall not die."

But this considerate exercise is needed, not only upon the first entrance into the ways of God, but in every successive step of our path. It will form the habit of daily "communion with our own heart;" without which, disorder and confusion will bewilder our steps. Probably David did not know how far his feet had backslidden from the ways of his God, until this serious consideration of his state brought conviction to his soul—so imperceptible is the declining of the heart from God! Nor is it a few transient thoughts or resolutions, that will effect this turn of the heart to God. A man may maintain a fruitless struggle to return to God for many years in sincerity and earnestness; while the simple act of faith in the power and love of Jesus will at once bring him back. Thus, while "thinking on his ways," let him walk in Christ as the way of return—and he will walk in the way of God's testimonies with acceptance and delight. In this spirit of simplicity, he will listen to the first whisper of the convincing voice of the Spirit, which marks the early steps of return from secret declension from God. He will also thankfully accept the chastening rod, as the Lord's appointed instrument of restoring His wandering children to Himself. For so prone are they to turn their feet away from the Lord—so continually are they "turning aside like a deceitful bow."—and so deaf are they, from the constitution of their sinful nature, to the ordinary calls of God; that, in love and tender faithfulness to their souls, He is often constrained, by the stroke of His heavy hand, to arrest them in their career of thoughtlessness, and turn them back to Himself. Most suitable then for such a state is the prayer of Basil—'Give me any cross, that may bring me into subjection to Your cross; and save me in spite of myself!'

#### **60. I made haste, and delayed not, to keep Your commandments.**

A superficial conviction brings with it a sense of duty, without constraining to it. Men stand reasoning and doubting, instead of making haste. But a sound conviction sweeps away all excuses and delays. No time will be lost between making and performing resolutions. Indeed, in a matter of life and death—of eternal life and eternal death—the call is too clear for debate, and there is no room for delay. Many a precious soul has been lost by waiting for "a more convenient season"—a period, which probably never arrives, and which the willful neglect of present opportunity provokes God to put far away. Today is God's time. Tomorrow ruins thousands. Tomorrow is another world. "Today—while it is called today; if you will hear His voice" "make haste, and delay not." Resolutions, however sincere, and convictions, however serious, "will pass away, as the morning cloud and as the early dew," unless they are carefully cherished,

and instantly improved. The bonds of iniquity will soon prove too strong for the bonds of your own resolutions; and in the first hour of temptation, conviction left to chance to grow, will prove as powerless as the "seven green withs" to bind the giant Samson. If ever delays are dangerous, much more are they in this concern of eternity. If therefore convictions begin to work, instantly yield to their influence. If any worldly or sinful desire is touched, let this be the moment for its crucifixion. If any affection is kindled towards the Savior, give immediate expression to its voice. If any grace is reviving, let it be called forth into instant duty. This is the best—the only—expedient to fix and detain the motion of the Spirit now striving in the heart: and who knows but the improvement of the present advantage may be the moment of victory over difficulties hitherto found insuperable, and may open the path to heaven with less interruption, and more steady progress?

It is from the neglect of this haste that convictions often alternately ebb and flow so long, before they settle in a sound conversion. Indeed the instant movement—making haste, and delaying not—marks the principle of the spiritual life. This was the prodigal's resolution, no sooner formed than in action. He said, "I will arise, and go to my father—and he arose, and came to his father." When Matthew heard the voice, "Follow Me—he left all, rose up and followed Him." When Zaccheus was called from the top of the sycamore-tree, "Make haste, and come down, for today I must abide at your house—he made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully."

Ah! as you prize a hope for eternity; as you wish to "flee from the wrath to come," and to "flee for refuge to the hope set before you"—beware of smothering early convictions. They may prove the first dawn of eternal day upon the soul—the first visit of the quickening Spirit to the heart. Guard them with unceasing watchfulness. Nourish them with believing prayer. "Exercise" them unto practical "godliness." "Quench not the Spirit." Let not the spark be extinguished by opposition of the world. Let it not expire for lack of the fuel of grace. Let it not lie dormant or inactive. "Stir up the gift of God which is in you." Every exercise, every motion, adds grace to grace, and increases its vigor, health, and fruitfulness. The more we do, the more we find we can do. The withered hand, whenever stretched forth in obedience to the Savior's word, and in dependence on His grace, will never lack a supply of spiritual strength. Every successive act strengthens the disposition, until a continual succession has formed the ready and active habit of godliness. Thus the Lord works in setting us to work. Therefore think—determine—turn—make haste, and delay not; and we wish you God speed; "we bless you in the name of the Lord."

Professor! did you realize eternity, would you hover as you do between heaven and hell? If you were truly alive and awake, no motion would be swift enough for your desire to "flee from the wrath to come"—to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you." If ever God should touch your heart to feel the heavenly sweetness of communion with Him, will there be no regret, that the privilege was not sooner sought and enjoyed? Had I betaken myself earlier to a hearty interest

in the ways of God, how much more knowledge, experience, and comfort should I have attained! how much more honor should I have brought to God! how much more profit to my fellow-sinners! Remember, every day of carnal pleasure or lukewarm formality is a day lost to God—to your own happiness—to eternity.

A word to the believer—Have you any doubts to clear up, any peace to regain in the ways of the Lord? Make haste to set your heart to the work. Make haste to the blood of atonement. Be on the watch to "hear the Shepherd's voice," even if it be the voice of reproof. Promptness is a most important exercise of the habit of faith. Delay brings guilt to the conscience. The blessing of conviction—the comfortable sense of acceptance—the freedom of the Lord's service—is sacrificed to sloth and procrastination. The work that is hard today will be harder still tomorrow, by the resistance of this day's convictions. A greater cost of self-denial, a heavier burden of sorrow, and increasing unfitness for the service of God, will be the issue of delay. Be continually therefore looking for some beam of light to descend, and some influence of grace to flow in upon you from your exalted Head. A simple and vigorous faith will quickly enliven you with that love, delight, rejoicing in the Lord, readiness to work, and cheerfulness to suffer, which will once again make the ways of God "pleasantness and peace" to your soul.

### **61. The bands of the wicked have robbed me; but I have not forgotten Your law.**

Are we not too apt to cull out the easy work of the Gospel, and to call this love to God? Whereas true love is supreme, and ready to be at some loss, and to part with near and dear objects, knowing that He "is able to give us much more than" we lose for Him. Our resolution to keep His commandments will soon be put to the test. Some trial to the flesh will prove whether we flinch from the cross, or study to prepare ourselves for it. Few of us, perhaps, have literally known this trial of David. But the lesson to be learned from his frame of mind under it, is of great importance to all who profess to have their "treasure in heaven." It teaches us, that only exercised faith will sustain us in the time of trouble. This faith will enable us instantly to recollect our heavenly portion, and to assure our interest in it, in a remembrance of the law of our God. Had David forgotten God's law, no other resource of comfort opened before him. But it was ready—substantiating to his mind "the things that were not seen and eternal." Look again at the Apostle's deliberate estimate of this very trial—not only bearing his loss, but absolutely forgetting it in the enjoyment of his better portion, "Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things; and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

The temper of mind under such trials as this, serves indeed most clearly to discover the real bent of the heart. If we are in possession of a spiritual and heavenly portion, we shall bear to be robbed by the bands of the wicked, and yet,

"hold fast our profession." David, under this calamity, "encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Job, under the same visitation, "fell upon the ground, and worshiped." The blessings, indeed, we lose, are but as a feather compared with the blessings which we retain. The Providence of God is an abundant support for His children. Their prospects (not to speak of their present privileges) effectually secure them from ultimate loss, even in the spoiling of their worldly all. Thus the early Christians permitted the bands of the wicked to rob them—no, "they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance." We have, indeed, little reason to be frightened from religion by the anticipation of its trials. The exchange of the world for God, and of the service of sin for the ways of heaven, leaves no room for regret in life, in death, or in eternity. The Christian's darkest hour is ten thousand times brighter than the brightest day of the ungodly. The hope of the crown will enable us to bear the cross, and to realize its sanctifying support as a matter for unbounded praise.

But how desolate are the poor votaries of the world in the hour of trouble! Ignorant of the all-sufficiency of the refuge of the gospel; instead of being driven to it by the gracious visitations of God, they would rather retreat into any hiding-place of their own, than direct their steps backward to Him. Their circumstances of distress are most intensely aggravated by the sullen rebellion of the heart, which refuses to listen to those breathings of the Savior's love, that would guide them to Himself, as their sure, peaceful, and eternal rest! Would that we could persuade them to cast their souls in penitence and faith before His blessed cross! The burden of sin, as Bunyan's pilgrim found, would then drop from their backs. And this burden once removed—other burdens, before intolerable, would be found comparatively light; no—all burdens would be removed in the enjoyment of the Christian privilege of casting all—sin—care—and trouble, upon Jesus. Contrast the state of destitution without Him, with the abundant resources of the people of God. We have a double heaven—a heaven on earth, and a heaven above—one in present sunshine—the other in "the city, which has no need of the sun"—where our joys will be immediate—unclouded—eternal. Thus our portion embraces both worlds. Our present "joy no man takes from us;" and we have "laid up treasures in heaven," where the bands of the wicked can "never break through, nor steal."

Christian! does not your faith realize a subsistence of things not seen? The only realities in the apprehension of the world are "the things that are seen, and are temporal." Your realities are "the things that are not seen, and are eternal." Then, remember—if you be robbed of your earthly all, your treasure is beyond the reach of harm. You can still say, "I have all, and abound." You can live splendidly upon your God, though all is beggary around you. You confess the remembrance of the law of your God to be your unfailing stay, "Unless Your law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction."

## **62. At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto You: because of Your righteous judgments.**

Another exercise of sacred pleasure is the ways of the Lord! His portion was always satisfying to this holy man, and he was daily feeding upon it with fresh delight. There was no occasion for the painful restrictions and mortifications of a monastery to oblige him to self-denying observances. Much less was there any desire, by these extraordinary services, to work out a righteousness of his own, to recommend him to the favor of God. His diligence in this heavenly work was the spontaneous effusion of a heart "filled with the Spirit." Presenting the morning and the evening service "seven times a day," was not enough for him; but he must rise at midnight to continue his song of praise. These hours sometimes had been spent in overwhelming sorrow. Now they were given to the privileged employment of praise. Indeed it seems to have been his frequent custom to stir up his gratitude by a midnight review of the Lord's daily manifestations of mercy. A most exciting example—especially for the child of sorrow, when "wearisome nights are appointed to him," and he "is full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day!" Thus "let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds." We observe this Christian enjoyment under circumstances of outward trial. When "at midnight—their feet made fast in the stocks—Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God:" they gave thanks, because of His righteous judgments.

We often complain of our lack of spirituality in the Divine life—how much our body hinders the ascent of the soul heavenwards—how often drowsiness overcomes our evening communion with our God; the "weakness of the flesh" overpowering the "willingness of the Spirit." But, after making all due allowances for constitutional infirmity, how far are we "instant in season and out of season" in the mortification of the flesh? Do we earnestly seek for a heart delighting in heavenly things? The more the flesh is denied for the service of God, the more we shall be elevated for the enjoyment, and realize the privilege of the work; and instead of having so often to mourn that our "souls cleave to the dust," we shall "mount upwards with eagles' wings," and even now by anticipation, take our place before "the throne of God and the Lamb." Such is the active influence of self-denial in exercising our graces, and promoting our comfort! Oh! how much more fervent would be our prayers— how much more fruitful in blessings—were they enlivened with more abundant delight in the 'angelic work of praise!' (Baxter.) The theme is always before us. The subject of the heavenly song should constantly engage our songs on earth—Jesus and His love—the "worthiness of the Lamb that was slain"—His "power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Midnight wakefulness would be far sweeter than slumber; yes, night itself would be turned into day, did the judgments of God, as manifested in the glory of the Savior, thus occupy our hearts. Lord! tune my heart to Your praise, and then no time will be unseasonable for this blessed employment. Time thus redeemed from sleep will be an foretaste of the unwearied service of heaven.



### **63. I am a companion of all who fear you, and of those who keep your precepts.**

Those that love the Lord's service naturally associate with kindred spirits—with those that fear Him, and keep His precepts. These two features identify the same character: as cheerful obedience is always the fruit of filial fear. These then are the Lord's people; and union with Him is in fact union with them. Sometimes the society of the refined and intelligent of this world may be more congenial to our natural taste. But ought there not to be a restraint here? Ought not the Christian to say, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place?" and "should I love them that hate the Lord?" Let those of us, who live in close, and to a certain degree necessary, contact with the world, subject their hearts to an evening scrutiny on this subject. 'Has the society of this day refreshed my soul, or raised my heart to spiritual things? Has it promoted a watchful temper? Or has it not rather "quenched the spirit" of prayer, and restrained my communion with God? To meet the Christian in ordinary courtesy, not in unity of heart, is a sign of an unspiritual walk with God. Fellowship with God is "walking in the light." "Fellowship one with another" is the natural flow. "The communion of saints" is the fruit and effect of communion with God.

The calls of duty, or the leadings of Providence, may indeed unavoidably connect us with those, who "have no fear of God before their eyes." Nor should we repel them, by religiously affecting a sullen or uncourteous habit. But such men, whatever be their attractions, will not be the companions of our choice. Fellowship with them is to "remove the ancient landmark;" to forget the broad line of separation between us and them; and to venture into the most hazardous atmosphere. If indeed our hearts were ascending, like a flame of fire, with a natural motion heavenwards, and carrying with them all in their way, the choice of the companions of our pilgrimage would be a matter of little importance. But so deadening to our spirit is the conversation of the men of this world (however commanding their talents, or interesting their topics), that even if we have been just before enlivened by the high privilege of communion with God, the free and self-indulgent interchange of their society will benumb our spiritual powers, and quickly freeze them again. To underrate therefore the privileged association with them that fear God, is to incur—not only a most awful responsibility in the sight of God; but also a most serious hazard to our own souls.

If then we are not ashamed to confess ourselves Christians, let us not shrink from walking in fellowship with Christians. Even if they should exhibit some repulsive features of character, they bear the image of Him, whom we profess to love inexpressibly and incomparably above all. They will be our companions in our eternal home; they ought therefore to be our brothers now. How sweet, and holy, and heavenly, is this near relation with them in our common Lord! Shall we not readily consent to his judgment, who pronounced "the righteous to be more

excellent than his neighbor?" "Iron sharpens iron." If then "the iron be blunt," this will be one of the best means of "whetting the edge." The most established servants of God gladly acknowledge the sensible refreshment of this union of heart. It is marked in the word of God, as the channel of the communication of heavenly wisdom—as a feature in the character of the citizens of Zion—and as that disposition, which is distinguished with manifest tokens of the Savior's presence; and which the great day will crown with the special seal of His remembrance. "They that feared the Lord spoke often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard" it; "and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, says the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels."

#### **64. The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy: teach me Your statutes.**

What full provision is made for man's happiness! The first creation was full of mercy. God knew that He had created a being full of want. Every faculty wanted some suitable object, as the source of enjoyment in the gratification—of suffering in the denial; and now has He charged Himself with making provision for them all—so perfect, that no want is left unprovided for.

But what a picture does the earth now present on every side—a world of rebels! yet a world full of the mercy of the Lord! "O Lord, how manifold are Your works! in wisdom have You made them all. The earth is full of Your riches. The eyes of all wait upon You, and You give them their meat in due season. You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing." And how does the contemplation of the Lord's mercy in providence encourage our faith, in the expectancy of spiritual privileges! "O Lord! You preserve man and beast. How excellent is Your loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Your house; and You shall make them drink of the river of Your pleasures." 'As You largely bestow Your blessings upon all creatures according to their nature and condition, so I desire the spiritual blessings of the lively light of Your law and word, which are fitting and convenient for the being and happiness of my soul.' As an ignorant sinner, "what I see not, teach me." Teach me Your statutes; that which You have appointed, as the way of duty, and the path to glory—that path which I am utterly unable to discover, or when discovered, to walk in, without the help of Your grace. And indeed the hearts of His people are the vessels, into which the Lord is continually pouring more and more of Himself, until they shall "be filled with all the fullness of God." Every good, according to its character and degree, is diffusive. And thus the goodness or mercy of God pervades His whole universe—natural—plentiful—free—communicative.

Yet none but a believer will understand how to use the plea which is here employed. The mercy that he sees on every side, is to him a pledge and earnest of that mercy, which his soul needs within. The world indeed in its present fallen

state, when seen through the medium of pride and discontent, exhibits a picture of misery, not of mercy; and only ministers occasion for complaint against the Creator. But the believer—feeling the infinite and eternal desert of sin—cannot but know, that the lowest exercise of goodness in God is an act of free undeserved mercy. No wonder then that he sees mercy in everything—in every part of the universe of God—a world full of mercy. The very food we eat, our clothing, our habitations, the contrivances for our comfort, are not mere displays of goodness, but manifestations of mercy. Having forfeited all claim upon the smallest consideration of God, there could have been no just ground of complaint, had all these blessings been made occasions of suffering, instead of comfort and indulgence.

Indeed is it not a marvel, that when man—full of mercy—is lifting up his hand against his God—employing against him all the faculties, which His mercy gave and has preserved—that God should be so seldom provoked to strike by their aggravated provocations? What multitude—what weight—what variety of mercy does He still shower upon us! Even our hair, though seemingly so unimportant, the seat of loathsome, defiling, and even mortal disease—is the object of His special care. All the limbs of the body, all the faculties of the mind, all the affections of the heart, all the powers of the will: keeping us in health, and capable of acting for our own happiness—how does He restrain them from those exercises or movements which might be fatal to our happiness!

And then the question naturally recurs—and to a spiritual mind will never weary by its recurrence—Whence flows all this mercy? Oh! it is delightful indeed to answer such an inquiry—delightful to contemplate Him, "in whom" we are not only "blessed with all spiritual blessings;" but who is also the medium, through which our temporal comforts are conveyed to us. How sweet to eye these mercies, as bought with the most precious blood that ever was known in the world, and to mark the print of the nails of our crucified Friend stamped upon the least of them! We allow it to add a relish to our enjoyments, that we can consider them as provided by some beloved friend; and should not our mercies be doubly sweet in remembrance of that munificent Friend, who purchased them for us so dearly; who bestows them upon us so richly; yes, who gives Himself with them all?

Have we heard of this mercy of God? And do we feel the need of it for ourselves—for every moment? Then let us apply to the throne of grace in the free and open way of acceptance and access. Let us go to the King (as Benhadad's servants to the king of Israel,) in the spirit of self-condemnation and faith. Our acceptance does not depend (as in the case referred to) upon a "perhaps;" but it rests upon the sure word of promise, "Him who comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out."

**65. You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word.**

There is a time for all things in the believer's experience—for confession, prayer, and praise. This Psalm mostly expresses the confessions and prayers of the man of God—yet mingled with thankful acknowledgments of mercy. He had prayed, "Deal bountifully with Your servant." Perhaps here is the acknowledgment of the answer to his prayer—You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word. And who among us has not daily reason to make the same acknowledgment? Even in those trials, when we have indulged hard thoughts of God, a clearer view of His judgments, and a more simple dependence upon His faithfulness and love, will rebuke our impatience and unbelief, and encourage our trust. Subsequent experience altered Jacob's hasty view of the Lord's dealings with him. In a moment of peevishness, the recollection of the supposed death of a beloved son, and the threatened bereavement of another, tempted him to say, "All these things are against me." At a brighter period of his day, when clouds were beginning to disperse, we hear that "the spirit of Jacob revived: And Jacob said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive, I will go and see him before I die." And when his evening sun was going down almost without a cloud, in the believing act of "blessing the sons of" his beloved "Joseph," how clearly does he retract the language of his former sinful impatience!, "God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk—the God which fed me all my life long to this day—the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads!" This surely was in the true spirit of the acknowledgment—You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word.

And how is it that any of us have ever harbored a suspicion of unbelief? Has God in any one instance falsified His promise? Has "the vision" failed to come at the end? Has it ever "lied?" Has He not "confirmed His promise by an oath," "that we might have two immutable things" as the ground of "strong consolation?" Any degree less than the full credit that He deserves, is admitting the false principle, that God is a man, that He should lie, and the son of man, that He should repent. It weakens the whole spiritual frame, shakes our grasp of the promise, destroys our present comfort, and brings foreboding apprehensions of the future. Whereas, if we have faith and patience to wait, "in the mount the Lord shall be seen." "All things" may seem to be "against us," while at the very moment, under the wonder-working hand of God, they are "working together for our good." When therefore we "are in heaviness through manifold temptations," and we discover a "needs-be" for it all; and "the trial of faith is found unto praise and honor and glory"—when we are thus reaping the fruitful discipline of our Father's school, must we not put a fresh seal to our testimony—You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord? But why should we delay our acknowledgment until we come out of our trial? Ought we not to give it even in the midst of our "heaviness?" Faith has enabled many, and would enable us, to "glorify God in the fires;" to "trust" Him, even when "walking in darkness, and having no light;" and, even while smarting under His chastening rod, to acknowledge, that He has dealt well with us.

But if I doubt the reasonableness of this acknowledgment, then let me, while suffering under trials, endeavor to take up different language. 'Lord, You have dealt ill with Your servant; You have not kept Your word.' If in a moment of unbelief my impatient heart, like Jacob's, could harbor such a dishonorable suspicion, my conscience would soon smite me with conviction—"What! shall I, who am "called out of darkness into marvelous light"—shall I, who am rescued from slavery and death, and brought to a glorious state of liberty and life, complain? Shall I, who have been redeemed at so great a price, and who have a right to "all the promises of God in Christ Jesus," and who am now an "heir of God, and joint heir with Christ," murmur at my Father's will? Alas, that my heart should prove so foolish, so weak, so ungrateful! Lord! I would acknowledge with thankfulness, and yet with humiliation, You have dealt well with Your servant, according to Your word.' But how sinfully do we neglect these honorable and cheering acknowledgments! Were we habitually to mark them for future remembrance, we should be surprised to see how their numbers would multiply. "If we should count them, they are more in number than the sand." And truly such recollections—enhancing every common, as well as every special mercy—would come up as a sweet savor to God "by Christ Jesus." "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name; and do not forget all His benefits."

#### **66. Teach me good judgment and knowledge; for I have believed Your commandments.**

If the perception of the Lord's merciful dealings with my soul is obscure—Teach me good judgment and knowledge. Give me a clear and enlarged apprehension, that I may be ready with my acknowledgment, "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." Or even with an enlightened assurance of His wise and faithful dispensations, still would I urge this petition before Him, as needful for every step of my path. Indeed this prayer illustrates the simplicity and intelligence of Christian faith—always desiring, asking, and expecting the most suitable blessings. For what blessings can be more suitable to an ignorant sinner, than good judgment and knowledge: knowledge of ourselves, of our Savior, of the way of obedience—and good judgment, to apply this knowledge to some valuable end? These two parts of our intellectual furniture have a most important connection and dependence upon each other. Knowledge is the speculative perception of general truth. Judgment is the practical application of it to the heart and conduct. No school, but the school of Christ—no teaching, but the teaching of the Spirit—can ever give this good judgment and knowledge. Solomon asks it for himself—Paul for his people. Both direct us to God as the sole fountain and author.

We cannot fail to observe a very common defect in Christians;—warm affections connected with a blind or loose judgment. Hence, too often, a lightness in religion, equally unsteady in profession and in practice—easily satisfied with a narrow compass in the vast field of Scripture, instead of grasping a full survey of

those truths, which are so intimately connected with our Christian establishment and privilege. Much perplexing doubt, discouragement, and fear; much mistaken apprehension of important truth, much coldness and backsliding of heart and conduct, arises from the want of an accurate and full apprehension of the scriptural system.

This prayer has a special application to the tender and sensitive child of God. The disease of his constitution is too often a scrupulous conscience—one of the most active and successful enemies to his settled peace and quietness. The faculty of conscience partakes, with every other power of man, of the injury of the fall; and therefore, with all its intelligence, honesty, and power, it is liable to misconception. Like a defect of vision, it often displaces objects: and, in apparently conflicting duties, that which touches the feeling, or accords with the temper, is preferred to one, which, though more remotely viewed, really possessed a higher claim. Thus it pronounces its verdict from the predominance of feeling, rather than from the exercise of judgment—more from an indistinct perception of the subject presented to the mind, than from a simple immediate reference "to the law and testimony." Again—matters of trivial moment are often insisted upon, to the neglect of important principles. External points of offence are more considered, than the habitual mortification of the inward principle. Conformity to the world in dress and appearance is more strongly censured than the general spirit of worldliness in the temper and conduct of outward non-conformists; while the spirit of separation from the world, is totally disregarded. Thus are non-essentials confounded with fundamentals—things indifferent with things unlawful, from a narrow misconception of what is directly forbidden and allowed. Conscience, therefore, must not be trusted without the light of the word of God; and most important is the prayer—Teach me good judgment and knowledge.

The exercises of this state of feeling are both endless and causeless. In the well-intended endeavor to guard against a devious track, the mind is constantly harassed with an over-anxious inquiry, whether the right path is accurately discovered; and thus at once the pleasure and the progress of the journey are materially hindered. The influence therefore of this morbid sensibility is strenuously to be resisted. It renders the strait way more strait. It retards the work of grace in the soul. It is usually connected with self-righteousness. It savors of, and tends to produce, hard thoughts of God. It damps our cheerfulness in His service, and unfits us for the duty of the present moment. What however is more than all to be deprecated, is, that it multiplies sin; or, to speak more clearly, it superinduces another species of sin, besides the actual transgression of the law of God. For opposition to the dictates of conscience in any particular is sin, even though the act itself may be allowed by the law of God. We may therefore sin in the act of doing good, or in obedience to the liberty and enjoyment of the gospel, as well as in the allowed transgression of the law. Indeed, under the bondage of a scrupulous conscience, we seem to be entangled in the sad necessity of sinning. The dictates of conscience, even when grounded upon misconception,

are authoritative. Listening to its suggestions may be sinning against "the liberty, with which Christ has made us free," and in which we are commanded to "stand fast." No human authority can free from its bonds. Resistance to its voice is disobedience to God's viceregent, and therefore, in a qualified sense at least, disobedience to God Himself. And thus it is sin, even when that which conscience condemns may be innocent.

The evil of a scrupulous conscience may often be traced to a diseased temperament of body, to a naturally weak or perverted understanding, to the unfavorable influence of early prejudice—to a lack of simple exercise of faith, or perception of the matters of faith. In these cases faith may be sincere, though weak; and the sin, such as it is, is a sin of infirmity, calling for our pity, forbearance, prayer, and help. In many instances however, willful ignorance, false shame that will not inquire, or a pertinacious adherence to deep-rooted opinion, is the source of the disease. Now such persons must be roused, even at the hazard of wounding the conscience of the more tenderly scrupulous. But as the one class decidedly sin, and the other too frequently indulge their infirmity, the excitement will probably be ultimately useful to both. Both need to have the conscience enlightened; and to obtain "a right judgment in all things"—by a more diligent "search in the Scriptures"—by "seeking the law at the mouth of the priest"—and, above all, by earnest prayer with the Psalmist—Teach me good judgment and knowledge. Thus they will discern between what is imperative, and what is indifferent; between what is lawful, and what is expedient. If "whatever is not of faith is sin," then the only prospect of the removal of the doubt will be increase of faith—that is, a more full persuasion of the Divine warrant and instruction. "Howbeit there is not in everyone this knowledge:" yet the exhortation speaks alike to all, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Indeed the most favorable symptoms of scrupulosity (except where the disease originates in external causes) partake of the guilt of willful ignorance; because none can be said sincerely to ask for good judgment and knowledge, who do not diligently improve all means of obtaining it. If therefore, the scrupulous shrink from honestly seeking the resolution of their difficulties in private conferences (where they are to be had) with Ministers or experienced Christians, so far they must be considered as wilfully ignorant. We would indeed "receive them," "bear with their infirmities," and encourage them to expect relief from their hard bondage in the way of increasing diligence, humility, and prayer. While their minds are in doubt concerning the path of duty, their actions must be imperfect and unsatisfactory. Let them therefore wait, inquire, and pray, until their way be made plain. This done, let them act according to their conscience, allowing nothing that it condemns, neglecting nothing which it requires. The responsibility of error (should error be eventually detected) will not be—the too implicit following of the guidance of conscience—but the want of due care and diligence for its more clear illumination. Generally, however, the rule will apply, "If your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light."

But, besides the scrupulous conscience, the imperfectly enlightened conscience

presents a case equally to be deprecated. Often does it charge to a sinful source those incessant variations of feelings, which originate in bodily indisposition, or accidental influence of temptation. Sins of infirmity are confounded with sins of indulgence: occasional with habitual transgressions of duty. Only a part of the character is brought under cognisance: and while short-comings or surprisals are justly condemned: yet the exercise of contrition, faith, love, and watchfulness, is passed by unnoticed. Thus the gospel becomes the very reverse of the appointment of its gracious Author. It brings ashes for beauty, mourning for the oil of joy, and the spirit of heaviness for the garment of praise. If this evil is "not a sin unto death," it is "a sore evil under the sun," which may often give occasion for the prayer—Teach me good judgment and knowledge; that, in the simplicity of faith, I may be blessed with a tender conscience, and be delivered from the bondage of a scrupulous, and from the perplexity of an unenlightened, conscience. Let my heart never condemn me where it ought not. Let it never fail to condemn me where it ought.

But, alas! the perception of our need of this good judgment and knowledge, is far too indistinct and uninfluential. We need to cry for these valuable blessings with deeper earnestness, and more diligent and patient waiting upon God. Divine wisdom is a treasury, that does not spend by giving; and we may ask to be enriched to the utmost extent of our wants, "in full assurance of faith." But this faith embraces the whole revelation of God—the commandments as well as the promises. And thus it becomes the principle of Christian obedience. For can we believe these commandments to be as they are represented, "holy, just, and good," and not delight in them? "In those is continuance"—said the prophet, "and we shall be saved." Convinced of their perfection, acknowledging their obligations, loving them, and living in them, we shall "come to full age" in the knowledge of the Gospel, and, "by reason of use have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

### **67. Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Your word.**

The teaching of good judgment and knowledge will lead us to deprecate, instead of desiring, a prosperous state. But should the Christian, by the appointment of God, be thrown into the seductive atmosphere, he will feel the prayer that is so often put into his lips, most peculiarly expressive of his need, "In all time of our wealth—Good Lord, deliver us!" (Litany.) A time of wealth is indeed a time of special need. It is hard to restrain the flesh, when so many are the baits for its indulgence. Such mighty power is here given to the enemy, while our perception of his power is fearfully weakened! Many and affecting instances are recorded of the hardening of the heart even of the Lord's people, in the deadening influence of a proud and worldly spirit. But the fate of the ungodly is written as with a sunbeam for our warning, "When Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked—I spoke to you in your prosperity; but you said, I will not hear." But how awful will be the period, when the question shall speak to the conscience with all the poignancy of self-



conviction, "What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed?" What is the end of this flowery path? "Death!" "Surely You set them in slippery places: You cast them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors" "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."

Our Savior's allotment for His people, "In the world you shall have tribulation"—marks not less His wisdom than His love. This is the gracious rod, by which He scourges back His prodigal children to Himself. This is the wise discipline, by which He preserves them from the poisoned sweetness of carnal allurements, and keeps their hearts in a simple direction towards Himself, as the well-spring of their everlasting joy. With all of them this one method has been pursued. All have been taught in one school. All have known the power of affliction in some of its varied forms of inward conflict or outward trouble. All have found a time of affliction a time of love. All have given proof, that the pains bestowed upon them have not been in vain. Thus did Manasseh in affliction beseech "the Lord, and humble himself greatly before the Lord God of his fathers." Thus also in afflictions the Lord "heard Ephraim bemoaning himself;" and beheld Israel "seeking Him early," and the forlorn wandering child casting a wishful, penitent look towards his Father's house, as if the pleasures that had enticed his heart from home, were now embittered to the soul.

And thus the Christian can give some account of the means, by which his Father is leading and preparing him for heaven. Perhaps he did not at first see the reason. It was matter of faith, not of consciousness. But in looking back, how clear the path, how valuable the benefit, Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now have I kept Your word. 'I never prized it before. I could indeed scarcely be said to know it. I never understood its comfort, until affliction expounded it to me. I never until now saw its suitability to my case.' But what an heightened aggravation of guilt, when these especial mercies fail of their gracious end—when vanity, worldliness, and sin still reign with uncontrolled sway! Ah! when sinners are unhumiliated "under the mighty hand of God"—when they are afflicted, and not purged by affliction—when it is said of them, "They received not correction"—it seems the forerunner of that tremendous judgment, "Why should you be stricken any more?"

Heavenly Father! keep Your poor, weak, erring child from this fearful doom. Let not that measure of prosperity, which You may be pleased to give, prove my curse. But especially let every cross, every affliction which You are pleased to mingle in my cup, conform me more to my Savior's image, restrain my heart from its daily wanderings, endear Your holy ways and word to my soul, and give me sweeter anticipations of that blessed home, where I shall never wander more, but find my eternal happiness in keeping Your word.

**68. You are good, and do good: teach me Your statutes.**

The blessed effects of chastisement, as a special instance of the Lord's goodness, might naturally lead to a general acknowledgment of the goodness of His character and dispensation. Judging in unbelieving haste, of His providential and gracious dealings, feeble sense imagines a frown, when the eye of faith discerns a smile, upon His face; and therefore in proportion as faith is exercised in the review of the past, and the experience of the present, we shall be prepared with the ascription of praise—You are good. This is indeed the expression—the confidence—the pleading—of faith. It is the sweet taste of experience—restraining the legality of the conscience, the many hard and dishonorable thoughts of God, and invigorating a lively enjoyment of Him. Indeed 'this is the true and genuine character of God. He is good—He is goodness. Good in Himself—good in His essence—good in the highest degree. All the names of God are comprehended in this one of Good. All the acts of God are nothing else but the effluxes of His goodness distinguished by several names according to the object it is exercised about. When He confers happiness without merit, it is grace. When He bestows happiness against merit, it is mercy. When He bears with provoking rebels, it is patience. When He performs His promise, it is truth. When He commiserates a distressed person, it is pity. When He supplies an indigent person, it is bounty. When He supports an innocent person, it is righteousness. And when He pardons a penitent person, it is mercy. All summed up in this one name—Goodness. None so communicatively good as God. As the notion of God includes goodness, so the notion of goodness includes diffusiveness. Without goodness He would cease to be a Deity; and without diffusiveness He would cease to be good. The being good is necessary to the being God. For goodness is nothing else in the notion of it but a strong inclination to do good, either to find or to make an object, wherein to exercise itself, according to the propensity of its own nature; and it is an inclination of communicating itself, not for its own interest, but for the good of the object it pitches upon. Thus God is good by nature; and His nature is not without activity. He acts consistently with His own nature—You are good, and do good.' (Charnock)

How easily is such an acknowledgment excited towards an earthly friend! Yet who has not daily cause to complain of the coldness of his affections towards his God? It would be a sweet morning's reflection to recollect some of the innumerable instances, in which the goodness of God has been most distinctly marked, to trace them in their peculiar application to our own need; and above all to mark, not only the source from which they come, but the channel through which they flow. A view of covenant love does indeed make the goodness of God to shine with inexpressible brightness "in the face of Jesus Christ;" and often when the heart is conscious of backsliding, does the contemplation of this goodness under the influence of the Spirit, prove the Divinely appointed means of "leading us to repentance." Let us therefore wait on, even when we see nothing. Soon we shall see, where we did not look for it. Soon we shall find goodness unmingled—joy unclouded, unspeakable, eternal.

Meanwhile, though the diversified manifestations—the materials of our happiness, in all around us, be countless as the particles of sand, and the drops of dew; yet without heavenly teaching they only become occasions of our deeper misery and condemnation. It is not enough that the Lord gives—He must teach us His statutes. Divine truths can only be apprehended by Divine teaching. The scholar, who has been longest taught, realizes most his need of this teaching, and is most earnest in seeking it. Indeed, "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord," yet we may be utterly ignorant of it. The instances of goodness in the shape of a cross, we consider to be the reflection on it. Nothing is goodness in our eyes, that crosses our own inclination. We can hardly bear to hear of the cross, much less to take it up. We talk of goodness, but yield to discontent. We do not profess to dislike trial—only the trial now pressing upon us—any other cross than this; that is, my will and wisdom rather than God's. Is there not, therefore, great need of this prayer for Divine teaching, that we may discern the Lord's mercies so closely crowded together, and make the due improvement of each? Twice before had the Psalmist sent up this prayer and plea. Yet he seems to make the supplication ever new by the freshness and vehemency of his desires. And let me ever make it new by the remembrance of that one display of goodness, which casts every other manifestation into the shade, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son."

This constitutes of itself a complete mirror of infinite and everlasting goodness—the only intelligent display of His goodness—the only manifestation, that prevents from abusing it. What can I say to this—but You are good, and do good? What may I not then expect from You! "Teach me Your statutes." Teach me the Revelation of Yourself—Teach me the knowledge of Your Son. For "this is life eternal, that I might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

**69. The proud have forged a lie against me; but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart.**

If the Lord does us good, we must expect Satan to do us evil. Acting in his own character, as a "liar and the father of it," he readily puts it into the hearts of his children to forge lies against the children of God! But all is overruled by the ever-watchful care and providence of God, for the eventual good of His church. The cross frightens the insincere, and removes them out of the way; while the steadfastness of His own people marvelously displays to the world the power and triumph of faith. A most delightful source of encouragement in this fiery trial is, to take off the eye from the objects of sense, and to fix it upon Jesus as our pattern, no less than our life. For every trial, in which we are conformed to His suffering image, supplies to us equal direction and support. Do "the proud forge lies against us?" So did they against Him. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple, that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house

Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" "Consider Him, therefore, that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds."

But is it always lies that are forged against us? Is there no worldliness, or pride, or inconsistency in temper and walk, that opens the mouths of the enemies of the gospel, and causes "the way of truth to be evil spoken of?" Do they not sometimes "say all manner of evil" against some of us, for Christ's sake; yet alas! not altogether "falsely?" "Woe unto the world, because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man, by whom the offence comes!" If, however, the reproach of the world be "the reproach of Christ," "let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised." Insincerity of heart can never support us to a consistent and persevering endurance of the cross. A heart divided between God and the world will ever be found faulty and backsliding. Wholeness of heart in the precepts of God adorns the Christian profession, awes the ungodly world, realizes the full extent of the Divine promises, and pours into the soul such a spring-tide of enjoyment, as more than counterbalances all the reproach, contempt, and falsehood, which the forge of the great enemy is employing against us with unceasing activity, and relentless hatred. Yet do not forget, believer, that these proofs of the malicious enmity of the proud must often be received as the gentle stroke of your Father's chastisement. Let the fruits of it, then, be daily visible in the work of mortification—in the exercise of the suffering graces of the gospel—in your growing conformity to His image—and in a progressive fitness for the world of eternal uninterrupted love.

#### **70. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in Your law.**

A dreadful description of the hardened state of the proud forgers of lies! Yet not of their state only, but of every sinner, who stands out in willful rebellion against God. The tremendous blow of almighty justice has benumbed his heart, so that the pressure of mountains of sin and guilt is unfelt! The heart is left of God, "seared with a hot iron," and therefore without tenderness; "past feeling;" unsoftened by the power of the word: unhumiliated by the rod of providential dispensations, given up to the heaviest of all spiritual judgments! But it is of little avail to stifle the voice of conscience, unless the same power or device could annihilate hell. It will only "awake out of sleep, like a giant refreshed with wine," and rage with ten-fold interminable fury in the eternal world, from the temporary restraint, which for a short moment had benumbed its energy. Willful resistance to the light of the gospel, and the strivings of the Spirit, constrained even from a God of love the message of judicial abandonment, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Who then among us will not cry—From hardness of heart, and contempt of Your word and commandment, Good Lord! deliver us! (Litany.) Tenderness is

the first mark of the touch of grace, when the heart becomes sensible of its own insensibility, and contrite on account of its own hardness. 'Nothing'—said Jerome, in a letter to a friend—'makes my heart sadder, than that nothing makes it sad.' But when "the plague of our own heart" begins to be "known," and becomes a matter of confession, humiliation, prayer; the promise of "a new heart" is as life from the dead. The subject of this promise delights in God's law; and this amid the sometimes overwhelming power of natural corruption, gives a satisfactory witness of a change "from death unto life."

Christian! can you daily witness the wretched condition of the ungodly, without the constraining recollection of humiliation and love? What sovereign grace, that the Lord of glory should have set His love upon one so vile! What mighty power, to have raised my insensible heart to that delight in His law, which conforms me to the image of His dear Son! Deeply would I "abhor myself:" and gladly would I acknowledge, that the service of ten thousand hearts would be a poor return for such unmerited love. What, oh, "what shall I render to the Lord!"—Prayer for them who are still lying in death—praise for myself quickened from death. But what can give the vital breath, pulse, feeling, and motion? "Come, from the four winds, O breath; and breathe upon the slain, that they may live."

Let us apply, for the purpose of daily self-examination, this description of the heart, either as given up to its natural insensibility, or as cast into the new mold of delight in the law of God. Such an examination will prove to us, how much even renewed souls need the transforming, softening influences of grace. "The deceitfulness of sin hardens the heart" to its original character, as fat as grease, unfeeling, incapable of impression, without a Divine touch. O Lord, let not my heart be unvisited for one day, one hour, by that melting energy of love, which first made me feel, and constrained me to love.

### **71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Your statutes.**

If I mark in myself any difference from the ungodly—if I can feel that my natural insensibility is yielding to the influence of grace—if I am enabled to "delight in God's law," which before I had neglected as a "strange thing," if this softening transformation has been wrought in the school of affliction; let me thankfully acknowledge—It is good for me that I have been afflicted. None indeed but the Lord's scholars can know the benefit of this school and this teaching. The first lessons are usually learned under the power of the word pricking and piercing the heart; yet issuing in joyous good. All special lessons afterward will probably be learned here. 'I never'—said Luther—'knew the meaning of God's word, until I came into affliction. I have always found it one of my best schoolmasters.' This teaching distinguishes the sanctified from the unsanctified cross, explaining many a hard text, and sealing many a precious promise—the rod expounding the word, and the Divine Teacher effectually applying both.

Indeed, but for this discipline we should miss much of the meaning and spiritual blessing of the word. For how can we have any experimental acquaintance with the promises of God, except under those circumstances for which the promises are made? When, for example, but in the day of trouble, could we understand the full mercy of such a gracious word, as, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me?" And how much more profitable is this experimental learning than mere human instruction! When, therefore, we pray for a clearer apprehension and interest in the blessed book, and for a deeper experience of its power upon our hearts; we are, in fact, often unconsciously supplicating for the chastening rod of our Father's love. For it is the man "whom the Lord chastens," that He "teaches out of His law." Peter, indeed, when on the mount of transfiguration, said, "It is good for us to be here. Let us build here three tabernacles." Here let us abide, in a state of comfort, indulgence, and sunshine. But well was it added by the sacred historian, "Not knowing what he said." The judgment of David was far more correct, when he pronounced, that it was good for him that he had been afflicted. For so often are we convicted of inattention to the voice of the Lord—so often do we find ourselves looking back upon forsaken Sodom, or lingering in the plain, instead of pressing onward to Zoar, that the indulgence of our own liberty would shortly hurry us along the pathway of destruction. Alas! often do we feel the spirit of prayer to be quenched for a season by "a heart overcharged with the cares of this life"—or by the overprizing of some lawful comfort—or by a temper inconsistent with our Christian profession—or by an undue confidence in the flesh. And at such seasons of backsliding, we must count among our choicest mercies the gracious discipline, by which the Lord schools us with the cross, that we may learn His statutes.

After all, however, this must be a paradox to the unenlightened man. He can only "count it" all grief—not "all joy—when he falls into diverse temptations." His testimony is—It is evil—not it is good—for me that I have been afflicted. And even God's children, as we have before remarked, do not always take up this word while smarting under the rod. The common picture of happiness is freedom from trouble, not, as Scripture describes it, the portion of trouble. Yet how true is God's judgment, when it is the very end of affliction to remove the source of all trouble, and consequently to secure—not to destroy—solid happiness! We must however determine the standard of real good by its opposition—not its accordance—to our own fancy or indulgence. The promise of "every good thing" may be fulfilled by a plentiful cup of affliction. Present evil may be "working together for" ultimate "good." Let God take His own way with us. Let us interpret His providences by His covenant—His means by His end—and instead of fainting under the sharpness of His rod, we shall earnestly desire the improvement of it.

Are you, then, tried believer, disposed to regret the lessons you have already learned in this school? Or have you purchased them at too dear a cost? Do you grieve over the bleedings of a contrite heart, that have brought you under the

care of the healing physician? Or could you by any other way have obtained so rich a knowledge of His love, or have been trained to such implicit obedience to His will? As Jesus, "though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered;" so may we "rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of His sufferings," and be thankful to learn the same obedience, as the evidence and fruit of our conformity to Him.

The Lord save us from the greatest of all afflictions, an affliction lost! "Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest My soul depart from you; lest I make you desolate, a land not inhabited." "He who being often reprov'd, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." A call to tremble and repent, to watch and pray, and "turn to Him that smites us!"

Oh! is there one of that countless throng surrounding the everlasting throne, who has not sung, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted?" "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

## **72. The law of Your mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.**

Well might David acknowledge the benefit of affliction, since he had thus learned in God's statutes something that was better to him than thousands of gold and silver. This was indeed an enlightened judgment for one to form, who had so small a part of the law of God's mouth, and so large a portion of this world's treasure. And yet, if we study only his book of Psalms to know the important uses and privileges of this law, and his son's book of Ecclesiastes, to discover the real value of paltry gold and silver, we shall, under Divine teaching, be led to make the same estimate for ourselves. Yes, believer, with the same, or rather with far higher delight than the miser calculates his thousands of gold and silver, do you tell out the precious contents of the law of your God. After having endeavored in vain to count the thousands in your treasure, one single name sums up their value, "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Would not the smallest spot of ground be estimated at thousands of gold and silver, were it known to conceal under its surface a mine of inexhaustible treasure? This it is that makes the word so inestimable. It is the field of the "hidden treasure." "The pearl of great price" is known to be concealed here. You would not, therefore, part with one leaf of your Bible for all the thousands of gold and silver. You know yourself to be in possession of the substance—you have found all besides to be a shadow. "I lead"—says the Savior, "in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; that I may cause them that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." The grand motive, therefore, in "searching the Scriptures," is because "they testify of Christ." A sinner has but one want—a Savior. A believer

has but one desire—to "know and win Christ." With a "single eye," therefore, intent upon one point, he studies this blessed book. "With unveiled face he beholds in this glass the glory of the Lord:" and no arithmetic can compute the price of that, which is now unspeakably better to him than the treasures of the earth.

Christian! bear your testimony to your supreme delight in the book of God. You have here opened the surface of much intellectual interest and solid instruction. But it is the joy that you have found in the revelation of the Savior, in His commands, in His promises, in His ways, that leads you to exclaim, "More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than much fine gold!" Yes, indeed—every promise— every declaration—centering in Him, is a pearl; and the word of God is full of these precious pearls. If then they be the richest who have the best and the largest treasure, those who have most of the word in their hearts, not those who have most of the world in their possession—are justly entitled to this preeminence. "Let then the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom." For those who are rich in this heavenly treasure are men of substance indeed.

True—this is a correct estimate of the worth of God's law—better than this world's treasure. But is it better to me? Is this my decided choice? How many will inconsiderately acknowledge its supreme value, while they yet hesitate to relinquish even a scanty morsel of earth for an interest in it! Do I then habitually prefer this law of God's mouth to every worldly advantage? Am I ready to forego every selfish consideration, if it may only be the means of uniting my heart more closely to the Book of God? If this be not my practical conviction, I fear I have not yet opened the mine. But if I can assent to this declaration of the man of God, I have made a far more glorious discovery than Archimedes; and therefore may take up his expression of joyful surprise—"I have found it! I have found it!" What? That which the world could never have given me—that of which the world can never deprive me.

And—Lord—help me to prize the law as coming from Your mouth. Let it be forever written upon my heart. Let me be daily exploring my hidden treasures. Let me be enriching myself and all around me with the present possession and interest in these heavenly blessings.

Yet how affecting is it to see men poor in the midst of great riches! Often in the world we see the possessor of a large treasure—without a heart to enjoy it—virtually therefore a pauper. Oftener still in the Church do we see professors (may it not be so with some of us?) with their Bibles in their hands—yet poor even with the external interest in its "unsearchable riches." Often also do we observe a want of value for the whole law or revelation of God's mouth. Some parts are highly honored to the depreciation of the rest. But let it be remembered that the whole of Scripture "is given by inspiration of God and is therefore profitable" for its appointed end. Oh! beware of resting satisfied with a scanty treasure. Prayer and diligence will bring out not only "things new," but the "old"



also with a new and brighter glow. Scraping the surface is a barren exercise. Digging into the affections is a most enriching employ. No vein in this mine is yet exhausted. And rich indeed shall we be, if we gather only one atom of the gold each day in prayerful meditation. But as you value your progress and peace in the ways of God—as you have an eye to your Christian perfection—put away that ruinous thought—true as an encouragement to the weak, but false as an excuse to the slothful—that a little knowledge is sufficient to carry us to heaven.

**73. Your hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.**

In the vast universe of wonder, man is the greatest wonder—the noblest work of God. A council of the Sacred Trinity was held respecting his creation, "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Every part of creation bears the impress of God. Man—man alone—bears His image, His likeness. Everywhere we see His track—His footsteps. Here we behold His face. What an amazing thought, that the three Eternal subsistents in the glorious Godhead, should have united in gracious design and operation towards the dust of the earth! But thus man was formed—thus was he raised out of his parent dust, from this low original, to be the living temple, and habitation of Divine glory—a Being full of God. The first moment that he opened his eyes to behold the light and beauty of the new-made world, the Lord separated him for His own service, to receive the continual supply of His own life. His body was fitted as a tabernacle for his soul, "curiously wrought" by the hand of God; and all its parts and "members written in this book, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." Most naturally therefore does the contemplation of this "perfection of beauty" raise the adoring mind upward, "I will praise You; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works; and that my soul knows right well." Your hands have made me and fashioned me.

Could we suppose that man was formed to eat, to sleep, and to die—that, after taking a few turns upon the grand walk of life, he was to descend into the world of eternal silence, we might well ask the question of God, "Why have You made all men in vain?" But the first awakening of man from his death-like sleep enlightens him in the right knowledge of the end of his creation. If I am conscious of being the workmanship of God, I shall feel my relationship to Him, and the responsibility of acting according to it. I would plead then this relation before Him in asking for light, life, and love. I cannot serve You as a creature, except I be made a new creature. Give me a spiritual being, without which my natural being cannot glorify You. You have indeed "curiously wrought" my frame; but sin has marred all. Make me Your spiritual "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." Give me understanding—spiritual knowledge, that I may learn Your commandments, "Renew a right spirit within me."

But the natural man feels no need of this prayer. No, he is puffed up in his own

wisdom. He cannot receive the Divine testimony, which levels him, while he "understands not," with "the beasts that perish," and tells him, that he must "become a fool, that he may be wise." But should he ever know his new state of existence, he will offer up this prayer eagerly and frequently; and every step of his way heavenward he will feel increasing need of Divine "wisdom and spiritual understanding."

How does the song of heaven remind us of this end of our creation!, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power! for You have created all things; and for Your pleasure they are, and were created." In harmony with this song we must acknowledge, that the "Lord has made all things for Himself"—that He "created all things for His glory." And the recollection that He "created us by Jesus Christ," brings before us the grand work of redemption, and the work of the new creation consequent upon it. He who created us in His own image, when that image was lost, that He might not lose His property in us, put a fresh seal upon His natural right, and "purchased us with His own blood." Oh! let us not be insensible to this constraining motive to learn His commandments. "You are not your own, for you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

#### **74. Those who do fear You, will be glad when they see me: because I have hoped in Your word.**

How cheering is the sight of a man of God! How refreshing his converse! How satisfactory and enlivening is the exhibition of his faith! The goodness of God to one becomes thus the joy and comfort of all. What an excitement is this to close communion with our God, that the light which we thus receive will shine on those around us! What a comfort will it be even in our own hour of temptation, that the hope, which we may then be enabled to maintain in the word of God, shall prove the stay, not only of our own souls, but of the Lord's people! Many a desponding Christian, oppressed with such fears as this, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul"—when he hears of one and another exercised in the same trials, and who have hoped in God's word, and have not been disappointed, will be glad when he sees them. Thus David recorded his conflicts, that we may not despair of our own; and his triumphs, that "in the name of our God we might set up our banners." "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Thus also, under affliction, he was comforted with the thought of comforting others with the history of his own experience, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O praise the Lord with me, and let us magnify His name together. He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise to our God. Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; the righteous shall compass me about, for You shall deal bountifully with me."

In this view, the believer, who has been "sifted in the sieve" of temptation, without the least "grain" of faith or hope "falling upon the earth," stands forth as a monument of the Lord's faithfulness, to "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and to say to them that are of fearful heart, Be strong, fear not." Those that are "fearful, and of little faith," are glad when they see him. They "thank God" for him, and "take courage" for themselves. What a motive is this to keep us from despondency; that, instead of destroying by our unbelief, those who are already "cast down," we may enjoy the privilege of upholding their confidence, and ministering to their comfort! And how should the weak and distressed seek for and prize the society of those, who have been instructed by the discipline of the Lord's school!

Believer! what have you to tell to your discouraged brethren of the faithfulness of your God? Cannot you put courage into their hearts, by declaring that you have never been "ashamed of your hope?" Cannot you tell them from your own experience, that Jesus "is for a foundation-stone, a tried stone, a sure foundation?" Cannot you show them, that, because He has borne the burden of their sins, He is able to "bear their griefs, and to carry their sorrows?" that you have tried Him, and that you have found Him so? Oh! be animated to know more of Christ yourself; let your hope in Him be strengthened, that you may cause gladness in the hearts of those that, see you; so that, "whether you be afflicted, or whether you be comforted, it may be for their consolation and salvation."

But, O my God! how much cause have I for shame, that I impart so little of Your glorious light to those around me! Perhaps some poor trembling sinner has been glad when he saw me, hoping to hear something of the Savior from my lips, and has found me straitened, and cold, and dumb. Oh! that I may be so "filled with the Spirit," so experienced in Your heavenly ways, that I may invite "all that do not fear to come to me," that I may "declare what You have done for my soul;" so that, "when men are cast down, they may say, There is lifting up."

**75. I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that You in faithfulness have afflicted me.**

This is the Christian's acknowledgment—fully satisfied with the dispensation of God. This is his confidence—so invigorating to his own soul—so cheering to the church. The Lord's dealings are called His judgments—not as having judicial curses, but as the acts of His justice in the chastening of sin. Perhaps also—as the administration of His wise judgments in their measure and application. But here is not only the confession of the Lord's general judgment, but of His especial faithfulness to Himself. And this he knew—not from the dictates of the flesh (which would have given a contrary verdict), but from the testimony of the word, and the witness of his own experience. It could not be doubted—much less denied—'I know, O Lord, that Your rules of proceeding are agreeable to Your

perfect justice and wisdom; and I am equally satisfied, that the afflictions that You have laid upon me from time to time, are only to fulfill Your gracious and faithful promise of making me eternally happy in Yourself.' Blessed fruit of affliction! when we can thus "see the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy"—that His "thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace, and not of evil!" "The patience and faith of the saints" teach this difficult but most consoling lesson, in deciphering the mysterious lines in God's providence.

The child of God under the severest chastisement must acknowledge justice. Our gracious reward is always more—our "punishment always less, than our iniquities deserve." "Why should a living man complain?" In trouble he is indeed—but not in hell. If he complain, let it be of none but himself, and his own wayward choice. I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right—and who can doubt the wisdom? Who would charge the operator with cruelty, in cutting out the proud flesh, that was bringing death upon the man? Who would not acknowledge the right judgment of his piercing work? Thus, when the Lord's painful work separates us from our sin, weans us from the world, and brings us nearer to Himself, what remains for us, but thankfully to acknowledge His righteousness and truth? Unbelief is put to rebuke; and we, if we have indulged suspicion "that God has forgotten to be gracious," must confess, "This is our infirmity."

This assurance of the Lord's perfect justice, wisdom, and intimate knowledge of our respective cases, leads us to yield to His appointments in dutiful silence. Thus Aaron, under his most afflictive domestic calamity, "held his peace." Job under a similar dispensation was enabled to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!" Eli's language in the same trial was, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seems Him good." David hushed his impatient spirit, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because You did it." And when Shimei cursed him, he said, "Let him alone; let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him." The Shunammite, in the meek resignation of faith, acknowledged, "It is well." Hezekiah kissed the rod, while it was smiting him to the dust, "Good is the word of the Lord which You have spoken." Thus uniform is the language of the Lord's people under chastisement—I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right.

But the confession of justice may be mere natural conviction. Faith goes further, and speaks of faithfulness. David not only acknowledges God's right to deal with him as He saw fit, and even His wisdom in dealing with him as He actually had done, but His faithfulness in afflicting—not His faithfulness though He afflicted—but in afflicting him; not as if it were consistent with His love, but as the very fruit of His love. It is not enough to justify God. What abundant cause is there to praise Him! It is not enough to forbear to murmur. How exciting is the display of His faithfulness and love! Yes—the trials appointed for us are none else than the faithful performance of His everlasting engagements. And to this cause we may always trace (and it is our privilege to believe it, where we cannot visibly trace it) the reason of much that is painful to the flesh. Let us only mark its gracious

effects in our restoration—instruction—healing of our backslidings, and the continual purging of sins—and then say—'Is not the faithfulness of God gloriously displayed?' The Philistines could not understand Samson's riddle—how "Meat could come out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong." As little can the world comprehend the fruitfulness of the Christian's trials; how his gracious Lord sweetens to him the bitter waters of Marah, and makes the cross not so much the punishment as the remedy of sin. He finds therefore no inclination, and he feels that he has no interest in having any change made in the Lord's appointments, revolting as they may be to the flesh. He readily acknowledges that His merciful designs could not have been accomplished in any other way; while under trials many sweet tokens of love are given, which, under circumstances of outward prosperity, could not have been received with the same gratitude and delight.

You that are living at ease in the indulgence of what this poor world can afford, how little does the Christian envy your portion! How surely in some future day will you be taught by experience to envy his! The world's riches are daily becoming poorer, and its pleasures more tasteless; and what will they be, and how will they appear, when eternity is at hand! Whereas affliction is the special token of our Father's love, conformity to the image of Jesus, and preparation for His service and kingdom. It is the only blessing that the Lord gives, without requiring us to ask for it. We receive it, therefore, as promised, not as threatened; and when the "peaceable fruits of righteousness," which it works in God's time and way, spring up in our hearts, humbly and gratefully will we acknowledge the righteousness of His judgments, and the faithfulness of His corrections.

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