

## Gospel Grounds & Evidences

### Part III

By [John Owen](#)

Those in whom it is are "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them," Eph.4:18. This life of God is that holiness and obedience which he requires of us in their principles and duties; and to be alienated from it is to dislike and disapprove of it: and such is the frame of mind in all unregenerate persons.

Having thus prepared the way, I return unto the declaration and confirmation of the assertion, namely,--

Treat true and saving faith, in all storms and temptations, in all darkneses and distresses, will evidence itself unto the comfort and supportment of them in whom it is, by a constant, universal approbation of the whole will of God, concerning our holiness and obedience, both in general and in every particular instance of it.

#### **We may a little explain it:**

1. Faith will not suffer the mind, on any occasion or temptation, to entertain the least dislike of this way of holiness, or of any thing that belongs unto it. The mind may sometimes, through temptations, fall under apprehensions that one shall be eternally ruined for want of a due compliance with it; this makes it displeased with itself, but not with the obedience required. Rom.7:10,12, "The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death; but the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." "However it be with me, whatever becomes of me, though I die and perish, yet the law is holy, just, and good." It dislikes nothing in the will of God, though it cannot attain unto a compliance with it. Sometimes the conscience is under perplexities and rebukes for sin; sometimes the mind is burdened by the tergiversation of the flesh unto duties that are cross unto its inclinations and interests; sometimes the world threatens the utmost dangers unto the performance of some duties of religion: but none of these are able to provoke the soul that is under the conduct of faith to dislike, to think hard of, any of those ways and duties whence these difficulties arise.

And,

2. As it will not dislike any thing in this way of holiness, so it will not desire on any occasion that there should be any alteration in it, or any abatement of it, or of any

thing required in it. Naaman the Syrian liked well of the worship of the true God in general; but he would have an abatement of duty as to one instance, in compliance with his earthly interest, which discovered his hypocrisy. Such imaginations may befall the minds of men, that if they might be excused, in this or that instance, unto duties that are dangerous and troublesome (like profession in the times of persecution), or might be indulged in this or that sin, which either their inclinations are very prone unto, or their secular interest do call for, they should do well enough with all other things. Accordingly, the practice of many does answer their inclination and desire. They will profess religion and obedience unto God, but will keep back part of the price;--will hide a wedge in their tents, through indulgence unto some corruption, or dislike of some duties in their circumstances: they would give unto themselves the measure of their obedience. And according as men's practice is, so do they desire that things indeed should be, that that practice should please God which pleased them. This faith abhors; the soul that is under the conduct of it is not capable of any one desire that any thing were otherwise than it is in the will of God concerning our holiness and obedience, no more than it can desire that God should not be what he is. No; though any imagination should arise in it, that by some change and abatement in some instances it might be saved, which now is uncertain whether that be so or no, it will admit of no such composition, but will choose to stand or fall unto the entire will of God.

We shall therefore, in the next place, proceed to inquire on what grounds it is that faith does thus approve of the whole will of God, as unto our holiness and obedience; as also, how it evidences itself so to do. And these grounds are two:--the one respecting God; the other, our own souls.

First, Faith looks on the holiness required of us as that which is suited unto the holiness of God himself,--as that which it is meet for him to require, on the account of his own nature, and the infinite perfections thereof. The rule is, "Be ye holy, for I the LORD your God am holy;"--"I require that of you which becomes and answers my own holiness; because I am holy, it is necessary that you should be so; if you are mine in a peculiar manner, your holiness is that which becomes my holiness to require."

We have before declared what this gospel holiness is, wherein it does consist, and what is required thereunto;--and they may be all considered either as they are in us, inherent in us, and performed by us; or as they are in themselves, in their own nature, and in the will of God. In the first way, I acknowledge that, by reason of our weaknesses, imperfections, and partial renovation only, as to degrees, in this life, with our manifold defects and sins, they make not a clear representation of the holiness of God; however, they are the best image of it, even as in the meanest of believers, that this world can afford. But in themselves, and their own nature, as it lies in the will of God, they make up the most glorious representation of himself that God ever did or will grant in this world; especially if we comprise therein the exemplification of it in the human nature of Christ

himself: for the holiness that is in believers is of the same nature and kind with that which was and is in Jesus Christ, though his exceed theirs inconceivably in degrees of perfection.

Wherefore we are required to be holy, as the Lord our God is holy; and perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect: which we could not be, but that in our holiness and perfection there is a resemblance and answerableness unto the holiness and perfection of God. And if a due sense hereof were continually upon our hearts, it would influence us unto greater care and diligence in all instances of duty and sin than, for the most part, we do attain unto and preserve. If we did on all occasions sincerely and severely call ourselves to an account whether our frames, ways, and actions bear a due resemblance unto the holiness and perfections of God, it would be a spiritual preservative on all occasions.

Faith, I say, then, discerns the likeness of God in this holiness, and every part of it,--sees it as that which becomes him to require; and thereon approves of it, reverencing God in it all: and it does so in all the parts of it, in all that belongs unto it.

1. It does so principally in the inward form of it, which we before described,--in the new creature, the new nature, the reparation of the image of God that is in it: in the beauty hereof it continually beholds the likeness and glory of God. For it is created "kata Theon",--according unto God, after him, or in his image,--"in righteousness and true holiness," Eph.4:24. "The new man is renewed after the image of him that created him," Col.3:10.

When God first created all things, the heavens and the earth, with all that is contained in them, he left such footsteps and impressions of his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, on them, that they might signify and declare his perfection,--his eternal power and Godhead; yet did he not, he is not said to have created them in his own image. And this was because they were only a passive representation of him in the light of others, and not in themselves; nor did they represent at all that wherein God will be principally glorified among his creatures,--namely, the universal rectitude of his nature in righteousness and holiness. But of man it is said, peculiarly and only, that he was made in the image and likeness of God: and this was because, in the rectitude of his nature, he represented the holiness and righteousness of God; which is the only use of an image. This was lost by sin. Man in his fallen condition does no more represent God; there is nothing in him that has any thing of the likeness or image of God in it; all is dead, dark, perverse, and confused. This new nature, whereof we speak, is created of God for this very end, that it may be a blessed image and representation of the holiness and righteousness of God. Hence it is called the "divine nature," whereof we are partakers, 2 Pet.1:4. And he that cannot see a representation of God in it, has not the light of faith and life in him. Hereon, I say, faith does approve of the form and principle of this holiness, as the renovation of the image of God in us; it looks upon it as that which becomes God to bestow

and require, and therefore that which has an incomparable excellency and desirableness in it. Yea, when the soul is ready to faint under an apprehension that it is not partaker of this holy nature, because of the power of sin in it and temptations on it, it knows not whether itself be born of God or no (as is the case with many);--yet where this faith is, it will discern the beauty and glory of the new creation in some measure, as that which bears the image of God; and thereon does it preserve in the soul a longing after it, or a farther participation of it.

By this work or act of it does faith discover its sincerity; which is that which we inquire after. Whilst it has an eye open to behold the glory of God in the new creature, whilst it looks on it as that wherein there is a representation made of the holiness of God himself, as that which becomes him to require in us, and thereon approves of it as excellent and desirable, it will be an anchor unto the soul in its greatest storms; for this is a work beyond what a mere enlightened conscience can arise unto. That can approve or disapprove of all the acts and effects of obedience and disobedience, as unto their consequent; but to discern the spiritual nature of the new creature, as representing the holiness of God himself, and thereon constantly to approve of it, is the work [of faith] alone.

2. It does the same with respect unto the internal acts and effects of this new creature, or principle of new obedience. The first thing it produces in us is a frame of mind spiritual and heavenly; they that are after the Spirit are "spiritually-minded," Rom.8:5,6. It looks on the opposite frame, namely, of being carnally-minded, as vile and loathsome; it consisting in a readiness and disposition of mind to actuate the lusts of the flesh. But this spiritual frame of mind, in a just constellation of all the graces of the Spirit, influencing, disposing, and making ready the soul for the exercise of them on all occasions, and in all duties of obedience,--this is the inward glory of the "King's daughter," which faith sees and approves of, as that which becomes God to require in us; whatever is contrary hereunto, as a sensual, carnal, worldly frame of mind, it looks on as vile and base, unworthy of God, or of those who design the enjoyment of him.

3. It does the same with respect unto all particular duties, internal and external, when they are enlivened and filled up with grace. In them consists our "walking worthy at God," Col.1:10; 1 Thess.2:12, such a walk as is meet for God to accept; that whereby and wherein he is glorified. The contrary hereunto, in the neglect of the duties of holiness, or the performance of them without the due exercise of grace, faith looks on as unworthy of God, unworthy of our high and holy calling, unworthy of our profession, and therefore does constantly condemn and abhor.

All this, as we observed before, faith will continue to do constantly, under temptations and desertions. There are seasons wherein the soul may be very weak, as unto the powers, effects, and duties of this spiritual life; such the psalmist oftentimes complains of in his own case, and it is evident in the experience of most. Few there are who have not found, at one time or another,

great weakness, decays, and much deadness in their spiritual condition. And sometimes true believers may be at a loss as unto any refreshing experience of it in its operations. They may not be able to determine in the contest whether sin or grace have the dominion in them. Yet even in all these seasons faith will keep up the soul unto a constant high approbation of this way of holiness and obedience, in its root and fruits, in its principle and effects, in its nature, disposition, and duties. For when they cannot see the beauty of these things in themselves, they can see it in the promises of the covenant, in the truth of the gospel, wherein it is declared, and in the effects of it in others.

And great advantage is to be obtained by the due exercise of faith herein. For,--

(1.) It will never suffer the heart to be at rest in any sinful way, or under any such spiritual decays as shall estrange it from the pursuit of this holiness. The sight, the conviction of its excellency, the approbation of it, as that which in us and our measure answers the holiness of God, will keep up the mind unto endeavours after it, will rebuke the soul in all its neglects of it; nor will it allow any quiet or peace within, without an endeavour after a comfortable assurance of it. That soul is desperately sick which has lost an abiding sense of the excellency of this holiness, in its answerableness unto the holiness and will of God. Fears and checks of conscience are the whole of its security against the worst of sins; and they are a guard not to be trusted unto in the room of the peace of God. This is one great difference between believers and those that have not faith. Fear of the consequent of sin, with an apprehension of some advantages which are to be obtained by a sober life and the profession of religion, do steer and regulate the minds of unbelievers, in all they do towards God or for eternity; but the minds of believers are influenced by a view of the glory of the image and likeness of God in that holiness, and all the parts of it, which they are called unto. This gives them love unto it, delight and complacency in it, enabling them to look upon it as its own reward. And without these affections none will ever abide in the ways of obedience unto the end.

(2.) Where faith is in this exercise, it will evidence itself, unto the relief of the soul, in all its darkness and temptations. The mind can never conclude that it wholly is without God and his grace, whilst it constantly approves of the holiness required of us. This is not of ourselves; by nature we are ignorant of it. This "life is hid with Christ in God," Col.3:3, where we can see nothing of it; hereon we are alienated from it, and do dislike it: "Alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us," Eph.4:18. And most men live all their days in a contempt of the principal evidences and duties of this life of God, and of the principle of it, which they look on as a fable. Wherefore, the mind may have great satisfaction in a sight of the beauty and approbation of this holiness, as that which nothing can produce but sincere and saving faith.

Secondly, Faith approves of this way of holiness and obedience, as that which

gives that rectitude and perfection unto our nature whereof it is capable in this world. It is the only rule and measure of them; and whatever is contrary thereunto is perverse, crooked, vile, and base. Some men think that their nature is capable of no other perfection but what consists in the satisfaction of their lusts; they know no other blessedness, nothing that is suitable to their desires, but the saving of nature, in the pursuit of its corrupt lusts and pleasures. So are they described by the apostle, Eph.4:19. The business of their lives is to make provision for the flesh, to fulfill it in the lusts thereof; they walk in the lusts of the flesh, "fulfilling" (so far as they are able) "the desires of the flesh and of the mind," Eph.2:3. They neither know nor understand what a hell of confusion, disorder, and base degeneracy from the original constitution, their minds are filled withal. This perfection is nothing but the next disposition unto hell; and it does manifest its own vileness unto every one who has the least ray of spiritual light.

Some among the heathen placed the rectitude of nature in moral virtues and operations, according unto them; and this was the utmost that natural light could ever rise up unto: but the uncertainty and weakness hereof are discovered by the light of the gospel.

It is faith alone that discovers what is good for us, in us, and unto us, whilst we are in this world. It is in the renovation of the image of God in us,--in the change and transformation of our nature into his likeness,--in acting from a gracious principle of a divine life,-- in duties and operations suited thereunto,--in the participation of the divine nature by the promises,--that the good, the perfection, the order, the present blessedness of our nature do consist.

Hereby are the faculties of our souls exalted, elevated, and enabled to act primigenial powers, with respect unto God and our enjoyment of him; which is our utmost end and blessedness. Hereby are our affections placed on their proper objects (such as they were created meet for, and in closing wherewith their satisfaction, order, and rest do consist),-- namely, God and his goodness, or God as revealed in Jesus Christ by the gospel. Hereby all the powers of our souls are brought into a blessed frame and harmony in all their operations,-- whatever is dark, perverse, unquiet, vile, and base, being cast out of them. But these things must be a little more distinctly explained.

1. There is in this gospel holiness, as the spring and principle of it, a spiritual, saving light, enabling the mind and understanding to know God in Christ, and to discern spiritual things in a spiritual, saving manner; for herein "God shines into our hearts, to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor.4:6. Without this, in some degree, whatever pretence there may be or appearance of holiness in any, there is nothing in them of what is really so, and thereon accepted with God. Blind devotion,--that is, an inclination of mind unto religious duties, destitute of this light,--will put men on a multiplication of duties, especially such as are of their own invention, in "a show of wisdom in will-

worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body," as the apostle speaks, Col.2:23; wherein there is nothing of gospel holiness.

"The new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him," Col.3:10. That this saving light and knowledge is the spring and principle of all real evangelical holiness and obedience, the apostle declares in that description which he gives us of the whole of it, both in its beginning and progress, Col.1:9-11, "We desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness." It is a blessed account that is here given us of that gospel holiness which we inquire after, in its nature, original, spring, progress, fruits, and effects; and a serious consideration of it as here proposed,--a view of it in the light of faith,--will evidence how distant and different it is from those schemes of moral virtues which some would substitute in its room. It has a glory in it which no unenlightened mind can behold or comprehend; the foundation of it is laid in the knowledge of the will of God, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. This is that spiritual, saving light whereof we speak; the increase hereof is prayed for in believers by the apostle, Heb.1:17,18, even "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints;" which here is called "increasing in the knowledge of God," verse 10. The singular glory of this saving light, in its original, its causes, use, and effects, is most illustriously here declared: and this light is in every true believer, and is the only immediate spring of all gospel holiness and obedience; for "the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him," Col.3:10.

This light, this wisdom, this spiritual understanding, thus communicated unto believers, is the rectitude and perfection of their minds in this world. It is that which gives them order, and peace, and power, enabling them to act all their faculties in a due manner, with respect unto their being and end. It is that which gives beauty and glory to the inward man, and which constitutes a believer an inhabitant of the kingdom of light,--whereby we are "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love," Col.1:13; or "out of darkness into his marvelous light," 1 Pet.2:9.

That which is contrary hereunto, is that ignorance, darkness, blindness, and vanity, which the Scripture declares to be in the minds of all unregenerate persons; and they are really so, where they are not cured by the glorious working of the power and grace of God before mentioned.

Now, faith discerns these things, as the spiritual man discerns all things, 1 Cor.2:15. It sees the beauty of this heavenly light, and judges that it is that which

gives order and rectitude unto the mind; as also, that that which is contrary unto it is vile, base, horrid, and to be ashamed of. As for those who "love darkness more than light, because their deeds are evil,"--it knows them to be strangers unto Christ and his gospel.

2. Again: there is required unto this holiness, a principle of spiritual life and love unto God. This guides, acts, and rules in the soul, in all its obedience; and it gives the soul its proper order in all its operations: that which is contrary hereunto is death, and enmity against God. Faith judges between these two principles and their operations: the former in all its acting it approves of as lovely, beautiful, desirable, as that which is the rectitude and perfection of the will: and the other it looks on as deformed, froward, and perverse.

3. The like may be said of its nature and operations in the affections, as also of all those duties of obedience which proceed from it, as it is described in the place before mentioned.

It remains only that we show by what acts, ways, and means, faith does evidence this its approbation of gospel holiness, as that which is lovely and desirable in itself, and which gives all that rectitude and perfection unto our minds which they are capable of in this world. And it does so,--

1. By that self-displicity and abasement which it works in the mind on all instances and occasions where it comes short of this holiness. This is the chief principle and cause of that holy shame which befalls believers on every sin and miscarriage, wherein they come short of what is required in it: Rom.6:21, "Those things whereof ye are now ashamed." Now when, by the light of faith, you see how vile it is, and unworthy of you, what a debasement of your souls there is in it, you are ashamed of it. It is true, the principal cause of this holy shame is a sense of the unsuitableness that is in sin unto the holiness of God, and the horrible ingratitude and disingenuity that there is in sinning against him; but it is greatly promoted by this consideration, that it is a thing unworthy of us, and that wherein our natures are exceedingly debased. So it is said of provoking sinners, that they "debase themselves even unto hell," Isa.57:9; or make themselves as vile as hell itself, by ways unworthy the nature of men. And this is one ground of all those severe self reflections which accompany godly sorrow for sin, 2 Cor.7:11.

And hereby does faith evidence itself and its own sincerity, whilst a man is ashamed of, and abased in, himself for every sin, for every thing of sin, wherein it comes short of the holiness required of us, as that which is base and unworthy of our nature, in its present constitution and renovation; though it be that which no eye sees but God's and his own, he has that in him which will grow on no root but sincere believing. Wherefore, whatever may be the disquieting conflicts of sin in and against our souls, whatever decays we may fall into,--which be the two principles of darkness and fears in believers, whilst this inward holy shame and self-abasement, on account of the vileness of sin, is preserved, faith leaves not

itself without an evidence in us.

2. It does the same by a spiritual satisfaction, which it gives the soul in every experience of the transforming power of this holiness, rendering it more and more like unto God. There is a secret joy and spiritual refreshment rising in the soul from a sense of its renovation into the image of God; and all the acting and increases of the life of God in it augment this joy. Herein consists its gradual return unto its primitive order and rectitude, with a blessed addition of supernatural light and grace by Christ Jesus; it finds itself herein coming home to God from its old apostasy, in the way of approaching to eternal rest and blessedness: and there is no satisfaction like unto that which it receives therein.

This is the second way wherein faith will abide firm and constant, and does evidence itself in the soul of every believer. However low and mean its attainments be in this spiritual life and the fruits of it, though it be overwhelmed with darkness and a sense of the guilt of sin, though it be surprised and perplexed with the deceit and violence thereof, yet faith will continue here firm and unshaken. It sees that glory and excellency in the holiness and obedience that God requires of us,--as it is a representation of his own glorious excellencies, the renovation of his image, and the perfection of our natures thereby,--as that it constantly approves of it, even in the deepest trials which the soul can be exercised withal; and whilst this anchor holds firm and stable we are safe.

### **III. The third evidence of the faith of God's elect**

Thirdly, Faith will evidence itself by a diligent, constant endeavour to keep itself and all grace in due exercise in all ordinances of divine worship, private and public.

This is the touchstone of faith and spiritual obedience, the most intimate and difficult part of this exercise; where this is not, there is no life in the soul. There are two things whereby men do or may deceive themselves herein:--1. Abounding in the outward performance of duties or a multiplication of them. Hereby hypocrites have in all ages deceived themselves, Isa.58:2,3. And it was the covering that the church of Rome provided for their apostasy from the gospel: an endless multiplication of religious duties was that which they trusted to and boasted in. And we may find those daily that pretend a conscience as unto the constant observation of outward duties, and yet will abstain from no sin that comes in the way of their lusts. And men may and do oftentimes abide constantly in them, especially in their families and in public, yea, multiply them beyond the ordinary measure, hoping to countenance themselves in other lusts and neglects thereby. 2. Assistance of gifts in the performance of them; but as this may be where there is not one dram of grace, saving grace, so when rested in, it is a most powerful engine to keep the soul in formality, to ruin all beginning of grace,

and to bring an incurable hardness on the whole soul.

Wherever faith is in sincerity, it will constantly labour, endeavour, and strive to fill up all duties of divine worship with the living, real, heart acting of grace; and where it does not so, where this is not attained, it will never suffer the soul to take any rest or satisfaction in such duties, but will cast them away as a defiled garment. He that can pass through such duties without a sensible endeavour for the real exercise of grace in them, and without self-abasement on the performance of them, will hardly find any other clear evidence of saving faith in himself.

There are three evils that have followed the ignorance, or neglect, or weariness of this exercise of faith, which have proved the ruin of multitudes:--

1. This has been the occasion and original of all false worship in the world, with the invention of those superstitious rites and ceremonies wherein it consists. For men having lost the exercise of faith in the ordinances of worship that are of divine institution, they found the whole of it to be useless and burdensome unto them; for without this constant exercise of faith there is no life in it, nor satisfaction to be obtained by it. They must, therefore, have something in it, or accompanying of it, which may entertain their minds, and engage their affections unto it. If this had not been done, it would have been utterly deserted by the most. Hereon were invented forms of prayer in great diversity, with continual diversions and avocations of the mind from what is proposed; because it cannot abide in the pursuit of any thing spiritual without the exercise of faith. This gives it some entertainment by the mere performance, and makes it think there is something where indeed is nothing. Hereunto are added outward ceremonies of vestments, postures, and gestures of veneration, unto the same end. There is no other design in them all but to entertain the mind and affections with some complacency and satisfaction in outward worship, upon the loss or want of that exercise of faith which is the life and soul of it in believers. And as any persons do decay herein, they shall find themselves insensibly sinking down into the use of these lifeless forms, or that exercise of their natural faculties and memory which is not one jot better; yea, by this means, some, from an eminency in spiritual gifts, and the performance of duties by virtue of them, have sunk into an Ave Maria or a Credo, as the best of their devotion.

2. This has caused many to turn aside, to fall off from and forsake the solemn ordinances of divine worship, and to retake themselves unto vain imaginations for relief, in trembling, enthusiastical singing and feigned raptures; from hence have so many forsaken their own mercies to follow after lying vanities. They kept for a while unto the observance of the divine institutions of worship; but not having faith to exercise in them, by which alone they are life and power, they became useless and burdensome unto them: they could find neither sweetness, satisfaction, nor benefit in them. It is not possible that so many in our days, if ever they had tasted of the old wine, should so go after new;--if ever they had

experience of that savour, power, and life, which is in the ordinances of divine worship, when acted and enlivened by the exercise of faith, should forsake them for that which is nothing: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." "Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." This, therefore, is the true reason why so many in our days, after they have for a season abode under, and in the observation of, the gospel ordinances of worship, have fallen off from them, namely, not having faith to exercise in them, nor endeavouring after it, they did really find no life in them, nor benefit by them.

3. Some, on the same ground, fall into profaneness, pretending to take up with a natural religion, without any instituted worship at all. Of this sort of persons we have multitudes in the days wherein we live; having nothing of the light of faith, they can see no form or comeliness in Christ, nor in any thing that belongs unto him. By these means are souls every day precipitated into ruin.

Herein, therefore, I say, true faith will evidence itself in all darkneses and distress whatsoever: it will always endeavour to keep itself, and all other graces, in a due and constant exercise in all duties of worship, private and public. It may sometimes be weakened in its acting and operations, it may be under decays, it may be as a sleep, and that not only as unto particular duties and seasons, but as unto the inward habitual frame of the mind; but where it is true and genuine, it will shake itself out of this dust, cast off the sin that does so easily beset us, and stir up itself, with all might and contention, unto its duty. And there is no more dangerous state for a soul than when it is sinking down into formality, and neglect of the exercise of faith, in a multitude of duties; then is it assuredly ready to die, if it be not dead already.

If we are wise, therefore, we will watch, and take care that we lose not this evidence of faith; it will stand us instead when, it may be, all other things seem to be against us. Some have been relieved by the remembrance of this exercise of faith, when they have been at the door of desperation:--such or such a season they had experience of the work of faith in prayer, has been their relief. An experience hereof is a jewel, which may be of no great use whilst it lies by you locked up in a cabinet, but which you will know the worth of if ever you come to need bread for your lives.

It is, therefore, worthwhile to inquire what we ought to do, or what means we ought to use, that we may keep up faith unto its due exercise in all the parts of divine worship, so as that it may give us a comforting evidence of itself in times of temptation and darkness? And unto this end the ensuing directions may be of use:--

1. Labour to have your hearts always affected with a due sense of the infinite perfections of the divine nature in all our approaches unto him, especially of his sovereign power, holiness, immensity, and omnipresence; and this will produce

in us also a sense of infinite distance from him. As this is necessary, from the nature of the things themselves, so the Scripture gives us such descriptions of God as are suited to in generate this frame in us. This is that which Joshua aimed to bring the people unto, when he designed to engage them in the service of God in a due manner, Josh.24:19-22; and that which the apostle requires in us, Heb.12:28,29. And unto the same end glorious descriptions and appearances of God are multiplied in Scripture. If we fail herein, if we do not on all occasions fill our minds with reverential thoughts of God, his greatness and his holiness, faith has no foundation to stand upon in its exercise in the duties of worship. This is the only inlet into the due exercise of grace: where it is wanting, all holy thoughts and affections are shut out of our minds; and where it is present, it is impossible but that there will be some gracious working of heart in all our duties. If we are empty hereof in our entrance of duties, we shall be sure to be filled with other things, which will be clogs and hindrances unto us; but reverential thoughts of God, in our approaches unto him, will cast out all superfluity of naughtiness, and dissipate all carnal, formal frames, which will vitiate all our duties. Keep your hearts, therefore, under this charge in all your accesses unto God, and it will constantly open a door unto that exercise of faith which we inquire after.

Hereon and herewith we shall be affected with a sense of our infinite distance from him; which is another means to stir up faith unto its due exercise in reverence and godly fear. So Abraham was affected, Gen.18:27. [This is that] which the wise man directs us unto, Eccles.5:2.

Carnal boldness in the want of these things ruins the souls of men,

(continued in part 4...)

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to RPM**

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).