

## Gospel Grounds & Evidences

### Part IV

By John Owen

Carnal boldness in the want of these things ruins the souls of men, endering all their duties of worship unacceptable unto God, and unprofitable unto themselves.

2. Affect your hearts with a due sense of the unsuitableness of our best duties unto his holiness and majesty, and of his infinite condescension in the acceptance of them. Suppose there is in any of our duties the best and the most lively exercise of grace that we can attain unto, the most fervency in prayer, with the most diligent attendance of our minds the most humility and contrite trembling in hearing the word, the most devout affection of our minds in other parts of worship; alas! what is all this to God? How little does it answer his infinite holiness! See Job 4:18,19; 15:15,16. Our goodness extends not unto him, Ps.16:2. There are no measures, there is no proportion, between the holiness of God and our best duties. There is iniquity in our holy things; they have need of mercy and pardon, of cleansing and justification, by the blood of Christ, no less than our persons: and an infinite condescension it is in God to take any notice of us or them; yea, it is that which we must live in all holy admiration of all our days.

Now if it be thus with our best duties, in our best frames, what an outrage of sloth and negligence is it, if we bring the carcass of duties unto God, for want of stirring up faith unto its due exercise in them! How great is this folly, how unspeakable is the guilt of this negligence! Let us, therefore, keep a sense hereof upon our hearts, that we may always stir up ourselves unto our best in duties of religious worship. For,--

3. A negligence herein, or the want of stirring up faith unto a due exercise in all duties of worship, is the highest affront we can put upon God, arguing a great regardlessness of him. Whilst it is so with us, we have not, we cannot have, a due sense of any of the divine perfections, of the divine nature; we turn God what lies in us into an idol, supposing that he may be put off with the outside and appearance of things. This the apostle cautions us against, Heb.4:12,13, and [is that] which God detests, Isa.29:13; and he pronounces him a deceiver, and cursed, who offers unto him the lame and blind while he has a male in the flock, Mal.1:14. Yet thus is it with us, in some degree, whenever we are negligent in stirring up faith into its proper exercise in holy duties: that alone renders them the male of the flock; without it they are lame and blind,--a corrupt thing.

It is a sad thing for men to lose their duties, to be at charge and trouble in the multiplication of them, and attendance unto them to no purpose. Oh, how much more sad is it when they are all provocations of God's glory! when they tend to increase the formality and hardness of their hearts, towards the ruin of their souls!

"Stand in awe," therefore, "and sin not; commune with your own hearts;" cease not, until on all occasions you bring them into that exercise of faith wherein you may glorify God as God, and not deal with him as an idol.

4. Unto the same end, keep your souls always deeply affected with a sense of the things about which you are to treat with God in all the duties of his worship. They are referred unto two heads:-- (1.) Those which concern his glory; (2.) Those which concern our own souls. Without a constant due sense of these things on our hearts, faith will not act itself aright in any of our duties. Without this intimate concern and deep sense, we know not whether we need faith in our prayers, or have an exercise of it; formality will drown all. The best of our prayers is but an expression unto God of what sense we have of these things. If we have none, we pray not at all, whatever we say or do; but when these things dwell in our minds, when we think on them continually, when our hearts cleave unto them, faith will be at work in all our approaches to God. Can you not pray? Charge your hearts with these things, and you will learn so to do.

5. Watch diligently against those things which ye find by experience are apt to obstruct your fervency in duties. Such are indispositions through the flesh, or weariness of the flesh, distracting, foolish imaginations, the occasions of life revolving in our minds, and the like. If such impediments as these be not removed, if they be not watched against, they will influence the mind, and suffocate the exercise of faith therein.

6. Above all, the principal rule herein is, that we would always carefully remember the concernment of Christ in these duties, with respect unto his office. He is the high priest over the house of God; through him, and under his conduct, are we always to draw nigh to God; and his work it is to present the prayers and supplications of the church to God. Now, we have no way to come unto Christ, for his assistance in the discharge of his office on our behalf, but by faith; and in all our duties of holy worship we make a profession of our doing so,--of our coming unto God by him as our high priest. If we endeavour not therein to have faith in exercise, how do we mock, or make a show to him of doing that which indeed we endeavour not to do! There can be no greater contempt of Christ in his office, nor greater undervaluation of his love. But a due consideration hereof, namely, of the concernment of Christ in all our duties, with respect unto the office which he discharges for us in heaven,--is that which directly leads faith into its proper exercise. For through him, and that in discharge of his office, we believe in God. And when the mind is exercised with due thoughts of him, if there be any

thing of true saving faith in the heart, it will act itself unto a blessed experience.

These things may be of use to stir us up, and guide us unto that exercise of faith in all holy duties, an experience whereof abiding in the soul will evidence the truth of it, unto our supportment and comfort in all temptations and distresses.

Some, it may be, will say that their gift in prayer is mean and weak,-- that they cannot express themselves with earnestness and fervency; and so know not whether there be any faith in exercise in their prayers or no. I answer, There is nothing at all herein; for grace may be very high where gifts are very low, and that frequently.

And it may be others will complain of the meanness of their gifts on whom they attend in prayer, which is such as they cannot accompany them in the exercise of any grace. I answer,--1. There is no doubt but that there is a great difference in the spiritual gifts of men in this matter, some being much more effectual unto edification than others. 2. Take care that you are called in providence and duty to join with them whom you intend; that you do not first voluntarily choose that which is unto your disadvantage, and then complain of it. 3. Be their gifts never so mean, if grace in their own hearts be exercised by it, so it may be in ours: where there is no evidence thereof, I confess the case is hard. 4. Let the mind be still fixed on the matter or things uttered in prayer, so as to close with, and act faith about, what is real object of it, and it will find its proper work in that duty.

#### **IV. The fourth evidence of the faith of God's elect**

I come, in the next place, to instance in a peculiar way whereby true faith will evidence itself,--not always, but on some occasions: and this is by bringing the soul into a state of repentance. And three things must be spoken unto,--1. In general, what I intend by this state of repentance. 2. What are the times and occasions, or who are the persons, wherein faith will act itself unto this end. 3. What are the duties required unto such a state.

1. By this state of repentance I do not understand merely the grace and duty of evangelical repentance; for this is absolutely inseparable from true faith, and no less necessary unto salvation than itself. He that does not truly and really repent of sin, whatever he profess himself to believe, he is no true believer. But I intend now somewhat that is peculiar, that is not common unto all, whereby on some occasions faith does evidence its power and sincerity.

Neither yet do I mean a grace, duty, or state, that is of another kind or nature from that of gospel repentance, which is common to all believers. There are not two kinds of true repentance, nor two different states of them that are truly penitent; all that I intend is an eminent degree of gospel repentance, in the habit or root, and in all the fruits and effects of it. There are various degrees in the

power and exercise of gospel graces, and some may be more eminent in one, and some in another: as Abraham and Peter in faith, David and John in love. And there may be causes and occasions for the greater and higher exercise of some graces and duties at one time than at another; for we are to attend unto duties according unto our circumstances, so as we may glorify God in them, and advantage our own souls. So the apostle James directs us, chap.5:13, "Is any afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms." Several states, and various circumstances in them, call for the peculiar exercise of several graces, and the diligent performance of several duties. And this is that which is here intended,--namely, a peculiar, constant, prevalent exercise of the grace and duties of repentance in a singular manner. What is required hereunto shall be afterwards declared.

2. As unto the persons in whom this is required, and in whom faith will evidence itself by it, they are of various sorts:-- (1.) Such as have been, by the power of their corruptions and temptations, surprised into great sins. That some true believers may be so, we have precedents both in the Old Testament and in the New;-- such, I mean, as uncleanness, drunkenness, gluttony, theft, premeditated lying, oppression in dealing, and failing in profession in the time of persecution; this latter in the primitive church was never thought recoverable but by faith acting itself in a state of repentance. Such sins will have great sorrows; as we see in Peter, and the incestuous Corinthian, who was in danger to be "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow," 2 Cor.2:7. Where it has been thus with any, true faith will immediately work for a recovery, by a thorough humiliation and repentance, as it did in Peter; and in case that any of them shall lie longer under the power of sin, through want of effectual convictions, it will cost them dear in the issue, as it did David. But in this case, for the most part, faith will not rest in the mere jointing again the bone that was broken, or with such a recovery as gives them peace with God and their own consciences; but by a just and due remembrance of the nature of their sin, its circumstances and aggravations, the shameful unkindness towards God that was in it, the grief of the Holy Spirit, and dishonour of Christ by it, it will incline and dispose the soul to a humble, contrite frame, to a mournful walking, and the universal exercise of repentance all its days.

And, indeed, where it does not so, men's recovery from great sins is justly to be questioned as unto their sincerity. For want hereof it is that we have so many palliated cures of great sins, followed with fearful and dangerous relapses. If a man subject to great corruptions and temptations, has by them been surprised into great actual sins, and been seemingly recovered through humiliation and repentance, if he again break the yoke of this stated repentance whereof we speak, he will quickly again be overcome, and perhaps irrecoverably. Herein, he alone that walks softly, walks safely.

(2.) It is necessary for such as have given scandal and offense by their miscarriages; this will stick very close unto any who has the least spark of saving faith. It is that which God is in a peculiar manner provoked with in the sins of his

people; as in the case of David, 2 Sam.12:14. So also Ezek.36:20; Rom.2:24. This keeps alive the remembrance of sin, and sets it before men continually, and is a spring, in a gracious soul, of all acts and duties of repentance. It was so in David all his days; and probably in Mary Magdalene also. Where it has been thus with any, faith will keep the soul in an humble and contrite frame, watchful against pride, elation of mind, carelessness, and sloth: it will recover godly sorrow and shame, with revenge, or self-reflection, in great abasement of mind; all which things belong to the state of repentance intended. They that can easily shake off a sense of scandal given by them, have very little of Christian ingenuity in their minds.

(3.) It is so unto such as have perplexing lusts and corruptions, which they cannot so subdue but that they will be perplexing and defiling of them; for where there are such, they will, in conjunction with temptations, frequently disquiet, wound, and defile the soul. This brings upon it weariness and outcries for deliverance, Rom.7:24. In this state faith will put the soul on prayer, watchfulness, diligence, in opposition unto the deceit and violence of sin. But this is not all; it will not rest here, but it will give the mind such a sense of its distressed, dangerous condition, as shall fill it constantly with godly sorrow, self-abasement, and all duties of repentance. No man can hold out in such a conflict, nor maintain his peace on right grounds, who does not live in the constant exercise of repentance,--indeed, who does not endeavour in some measure to come up unto that state of it which we shall afterwards describe. For men who have unnameable corruptions working continually in their minds, by imaginations, thoughts, and affections, to think to carry it in a general way of duties and profession, they will be mistaken if they look either for victory or peace; this sort of men are, of all others, most peculiarly called unto this state and duty.

(4.) Such as would be found mourners for the sins of the age, place, and time wherein they live, with the consequent of them, in the dishonour of God, and the judgments which will ensue thereon. There are times wherein this is an especial and eminent duty, which God does highly approve of. Such are they wherein the visible church is greatly corrupted, and open abominations are found amongst men of all sorts; even as it is at this day. Then does the Lord declare how much he values the performance of this duty,--as he testifies, Ezek.9:4, they alone shall be under his especial care in a day of public distress and calamity,--a duty wherein it is to be feared that we are most of us very defective. Now, the frame of heart required hereunto cannot be attained, nor the duty rightly performed, without that state of repentance and humiliation which we inquire into. Without it we may have transient thoughts of these things, but such as will very little affect our minds; but where the soul is kept in a constant spiritual frame, it will be ready for this duty on all occasions.

(5.) It becomes them who, having passed through the greatest part of their lives, do find all outward things to issue in vanity and vexation of spirit, as it was with Solomon when he wrote his Ecclesiastes. When a man recounts the various

scenes and appearances of things which he has passed through in his life, and the various conditions he has been in, he may possibly find that there is nothing steady but sorrow and trouble. It may be so with some, I say, with some good men, with some of the best men, as it was with Jacob. Others may have received more satisfaction in their course; but if they also will look back, they shall find how little there has been in the best of their transient comforts; they will see enough to make them say, "There is nothing in these things; it is high time to take off all expectations from them." Such persons seem to be called unto this especial exercise of repentance and mourning for the remainder of their lives.

(6.) Such as whose hearts are really wounded and deeply affected with the love of Christ, so as that they can hardly bear any longer absence from him, nor delight in the things wherein they are detained and kept out of his presence. This frame the apostle describes, 2 Cor.5:2,4,6,8. They live in a groaning condition, thoroughly sensible of all the evils that accompany them in this absence of the Bridegroom; and they cannot but continually reflect upon the sins and follies which their lives have been and are filled withal, in this their distance from Christ. Whereas, therefore, their hearts are filled with inflamed affections towards him, they cannot but walk humbly and mournfully until they come unto him. It may be said that those who have experience of such affection unto the Lord Jesus cannot but have continual matter of joy in themselves; and so of all men have least need of such a state of constant humiliation and repentance. I say it is so indeed, they have such matter of joy; and therewith Christ will be formed in them more and more every day. But I say also, there is no inconsistency between spiritual joy in Christ and godly sorrow for sin; yea, no man in this life shall ever be able to maintain solid joy in his heart, without the continual working of godly sorrow also; yea, there is a secret joy and refreshment in godly sorrow, equal unto the chiefest of our joys, and a great spiritual satisfaction.

These several sorts of persons, I say, are peculiarly called unto that exercise of faith in repentance which we inquire after.

Before I proceed to show wherein this state I intend does consist, and what is required thereunto (which is the last thing proposed), I shall premise some rules for the right judging of ourselves with respect unto them. As,--

1. Faith will evidence its truth (which is that we inquire after) in its sincere endeavour after the things intended, though its attainments as unto some of them be but mean and low; yea, a sense of its coming short in a full answering of them or compliance with them, is a great ingredient in that state called unto. If, therefore, faith keep up this design in the soul, with a sincere pursuit of it, though it fail in many things, and is not sensible of any great progress it makes, it will therein evidence its sincerity.

2. Whereas there are sundry things, as we shall see, required hereunto, it is not necessary that they should be found all equally in all who design this state and

frame. Some may be more eminent in one of them, some in another; some may have great helps and furtherance unto some of them in a peculiar manner, and some great obstructions in the exercise of some of them. But it is required that they be all radically in the heart, and be put forth in exercise sometimes, on their proper occasions.

3. This state, in the description of it, will sufficiently distinguish itself from that discontent of mind whereon some withdraw themselves from the occasions of life, rather condemning others than themselves, on mere weariness of the disappointments of the world, which has cast some into crooked paths.

1. The first thing required hereunto is weanedness from the world. The rule of most men is, that all things are well enough with them, with respect unto the world, whilst they keep themselves from known particular sins in the use of the things of it. Whilst they do so in their own apprehensions, they care not how much they cleave unto it,--are even swallowed up in the businesses and occasions of it. Yea, some will pretend unto and make an appearance of a course of life more than ordinarily strict, whilst their hearts and affections cleave visibly to this world and the things of it. But the foundation of the work of faith we inquire into must be laid in mortification and weanedness from the world.

In ancient times, sundry persons designed a strict course of mortification and penitence, and they always laid the foundation of it in a renunciation of the world; but they fell most of them into a threefold mistake, which ruined the whole undertaking. For,--

(1.) They fell into a neglect of such natural and moral duties as were indispensably required of them: they forsook all care of duties belonging unto them in their relations as fathers, children, husbands, wives, and the like, retaking themselves into solitudes; and hereby also they lost all that political and Christian usefulness which the principles of human society and of our religion do oblige us unto. They took themselves unto a course of life rendering the most important Christian duties, such as respect other men of all sorts, in all fruits of love, utterly impossible unto them. They could be no more useful nor helpful in the places and circumstances wherein they were set by divine Providence: which was a way wherein they could not expect any blessing from God. No such thing is required unto that renunciation of the world which we design; with nothing that should render men useless unto all men do Christian duties interfere. We are still to use the world whilst we are in it, but not abuse it; as we have opportunity, we must still do good unto all. Yea, none will be so ready to the duties of life as those who are most mortified to the world. Thoughts of retirement from usefulness, unless [under] a great decay of outward strength, are but temptations.

(2.) They engaged themselves into a number of observances nowhere required of them: such were their outward austerities, fastings, choice of meats, times of

prayer; whereunto, at length, self-maceration and disciplines were added. In a scrupulous, superstitious observance of these things their whole design at length issued, giving rise and occasion unto innumerable evils. Faith directs to no such thing; it guides to no duty but according to the rule of the word.

(3.) At length they began to engage themselves by vow into such peculiar orders and rules of a pretended religious life as were by some of their leaders presented unto them; and this ruined the whole.

However, the original design was good,--namely, such a renunciation of the world as might keep it and all the things of it from being a hindrance unto us in an humble walk before God, or any thing that belongs thereunto. We are to be crucified unto the world, and the world unto us, by the cross of Christ; we are to be so in a peculiar manner, if we are under the conduct of faith, in a way of humiliation and repentance. And the things ensuing are required hereunto:--

(1.) The mortification of our affections unto the desirable things of this life: they are naturally keen and sharp-set upon them, and do tenaciously adhere unto them; especially they are so when things have an inlet into them by nearness of relation, as husbands, wives, children, and the like. Persons are apt to think they can never love them enough, never do enough for them (and it is granted they are to be preferred above all other earthly things); but where they fill and possess the heart, where they weaken and obtund the affections unto things spiritual, heavenly, and eternal, unless we are mortified unto them, the heart will never be in a good frame, nor is capable of that degree in the grace of repentance which we seek. It is so with the most, as unto all other useful things in this world,--as wealth, estates, and peace: whilst they are conversant about them, as they suppose in a lawful manner, they think they can never overvalue them, nor cleave too close unto them.

But here we must begin, if we intend to take any one step into this holy retirement. The edge of our affections and desires must be taken off from these things: and hereunto three things are necessary:-- [1.] A constant, clear view and judgment of their uncertainty, emptiness, and disability to give any rest or satisfaction. Uncertain riches, uncertain enjoyments, perishing things, passing away, yea, snares, burdens, hindrances, the Scripture represents them to be;-- and so they are. If the mind were continually charged home with this consideration of them, it would daily abate its delight and satisfaction in them. [2.] A constant endeavour for conformity unto Christ crucified. It is the cross of Christ whereby we are crucified unto the world and all things in it. When the mind is much taken up with thoughts of Christ, as dying, how and for what he died, if it has any spark of saving faith in it, it will turn away the eyes from looking on the desirable things of this world with any delightful, friendly aspect. Things will appear unto it as dead and discoloured. [3.] The fixing of them steadily on things spiritual and eternal; whereof I have discoursed at large elsewhere. The whole of this advice is given us by the apostle, Col.3:1-5.



Herein faith begins its work, this is the first lesson it takes out of the gospel,-- namely, that of self-denial, whereof this mortification is a principal part. Herein it labours to cast off every burden, and the sin that does so easily beset us. Unless some good degree be attained here, all farther attempts in this great duty will be fruitless. Do you, then, any of you, judge yourselves under any of those qualifications before mentioned, which render this duty and work of faith necessary unto you? Sit down here at the threshold, and reckon with yourselves that unless you can take your hearts more off from the world,--unless your affections and desires be mortified and crucified, and dead in you, in a sensible degree and measure,--unless you endeavour every day to promote the same frame in your minds,-- you will live and die strangers to this duty.

(2.) This mortification of our affections towards these things, our love, desire, and delight, will produce a moderation of passions about them, as fear, anger, sorrow, and the like; such will men be stirred up unto in those changes, losses, crosses, which these things are subject unto. They are apt to be tender and soft in those things; they take every thing to heart; every affliction and disappointment is aggravated, as if none almost had such things befall them as themselves; every thing puts them into a commotion. Hence are they often surprised with anger about trifles, influenced by fear in all changes, with other turbulent passions. Hence are men morose, peevish, froward, apt to be displeased and take offense on all occasions. The subduing of this frame, the casting out of these dispositions and perverse inclinations, is part of the work of faith. When the mind is weaned from the world and the things of it, it will be sedate, quiet, composed, not easily moved with the occurrences and occasions of life: it is dead unto them, and in a great measure unconcerned in them. This is that "moderation" of mind wherein the apostle would have us excel, Phil.4:5; for he would have it so eminent as that it might appear unto "all men," that is, who are concerned in us, as relations, families, and other societies. This is that which principally renders us useful and exemplary in this world; and for the want whereof many professors fill themselves and others with disquietments, and give offense unto the world itself. This is required of all believers; but they will be eminent in it in whom faith works this weanedness from the world, in order unto a peculiar exercise of repentance.

(3.) There is required hereunto an unsolicitousness about present affairs and future events. There is nothing given us in more strict charge in the Scripture, than that we should be careful in nothing, solicitous about nothing, take no thought for tomorrow, but to commit all things unto the sovereign disposal of our God and Father, who has taken all these things into his own care. But so it is come to pass, through the vanity of the minds of men, that what should be nothing unto them is almost their all. Care about things present, and solicitousness about things to come, in private and public concerns, take up most of their thoughts and contrivances. But this also will faith subdue on this occasion, where it tends unto the promotion of repentance, by weanedness from

the world. It will bring the soul into a constant, steady, universal resignation of itself unto the pleasure of God, and satisfaction in his will. Hereon it will use the world as if it used it not, with an absolute unconcernment in it as unto what shall fall out. This is that which our Saviour presses so at large, and with so many divine seasonings, Matt.6:25-34.

(4.) A constant preference of the duties of religion before and above the duties and occasions of life. These things will continually interfere if a diligent watch be not kept over them, and they will contend for preference; and their success is according to the interest and estimation which the things themselves have in our minds. If the interest of the world be there prevalent, the occasions of it will be preferred before religious duties; and they shall, for the most part, be put off unto such seasons wherein we have nothing else to do, and it may be fit for little else. But where the interest of spiritual things prevail it will be otherwise, according to the rule given us by our blessed Saviour, "Seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof," etc., Matt.6:33.

I confess this rule is not absolute as unto all seasons and occasions: there may be a time wherein the observation of the Sabbath must give place to the pulling an ox or an ass out of a pit; and on all such occasions the rule is, that mercy is to be preferred before sacrifice. But, in the ordinary course of our walking before God, faith will take care that a due attendance unto all duties of religion be preferred to all the occasions of this life; they shall not be shuffled off on trifling pretences, nor cast into such unseasonable seasons as otherwise they will be. There also belongs unto that weanedness from this world, which is necessary unto an eminency in degrees of humiliation and repentance, watching unto prayer.

(5.) Willingness and readiness to part with all for Christ and the gospel. This is the animating principle of the great duty of taking up the cross, and self-denial therein. Without some measure of it in sincerity, we cannot be Christ's disciples; but in the present case there is an eminent degree, which Christ calls the hating of all things in comparison of him, that is required,--such a readiness as rejects with contempt all arguing against it,--such as renders the world no burden unto it in any part of our race,--such as establishes a determinate resolution in the mind, that as God calls, the world and all the concernments of it should be forsaken for Christ and the gospel. Our countenances and discourses in difficulties do not argue that this resolution is prevalent in us; but so it is required in that work of faith which we are in the consideration of.

2. A second thing that belongs hereunto is a peculiar remembrance of sin, and converse about it in our minds, with self-displicity and abhorrence. God has promised in his covenant that he "will remember our sins no more," that is, to punish them; but it does not thence follow that we should no more remember them, to be humbled for them. Repentance respects sin always; wherever, therefore, that is, there will be a continual calling sin to remembrance. Says the

psalmist, "My sin is ever before me."

There is a threefold calling our past sins unto remembrance:--

(1.) With delight and contentment. Thus is it with profligate sinners, whose bodies are grown unserviceable unto their youthful lusts. They call over their former sins, roll them over in their minds, express their delight in them by their words, and have no greater trouble but that, for the want of strength or opportunity, they cannot still live in the practice of them: this is to be old in wickedness, and to have their bones filled with the sins of their youth. So do many in this age delight in filthy communication, unclean society, and all incentives of lust,--a fearful sign of being given over unto a reprobate mind, a heart that cannot repent.

(2.) There is a remembrance of sin unto disquietment, terror, and despair. Where men's consciences are not seared with a hot iron, sin will visit their minds ever and anon with a troublesome remembrance of itself, with its aggravating circumstances. For the most part men hide themselves from this visitor,--they are not at home, not at leisure to converse with it, but shift it off, like insolvent debtors, from day to day, with a few transient thoughts and words. But sometimes it will not be so put off,-- it will come with an arrest or a warrant from the law of God, that shall make them stand and give an account of themselves. Hereon they are filled with disquietments, and some with horror and despair; which they seek to pacify and divert themselves from by farther emerging [immersing?] themselves in the pursuit of their lusts. The case of Cain, Gen.4:13,16,17.

(3.) There is a calling former sins to remembrance as a furtherance of repentance; and so they are a threefold glass unto the souls wherein it has a treble object:-- [1.] It sees in them the depravation of its nature, the evil quality of that root which has brought forth such fruit; and they see in it their own folly, how they were cheated by sin and Satan; they see the unthankfulness and unkindness towards God wherewith they were accompanied. This fills them with holy shame, Rom.6:21. This is useful and necessary unto repentance. Perhaps if men did more call over their former sins and miscarriages than they do, they would walk more humbly and warily than they do for the most part. So David in his age prays for a renewed sense of the pardon of the sins of his youth, Ps.25:7. [2.] The soul sees in them a representation of the grace, patience, and pardoning mercy of God. "Thus and thus was it with me: God might justly have cast me off for ever; he might have cut me off in the midst of these sins, so as that I should have had no leisure to have cried for mercy; and perhaps some of them were sins long continued in. O the infinite patience of God, that spared me! The infinite grace and mercy of God, that forgave unto me these provoking iniquities!" This frame is expressed, Ps.103:3,4.

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