

**GOD'S DELIGHT
IN THE
PROGRESS
OF THE
UPRIGHT**

BY

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God's Delight in the Progress of the Upright

Especially in Magistrates uprightness and constancy in ways of justice and righteousness in these Apostatizing Times, notwithstanding all discouragements, oppositions, etc.

Presented in a Sermon before the House of Commons at their last monthly Fast, London, December 26, 1648, by **Thomas Brooks**.

Job 17:8-9 "The righteous shall persevere in his way, and he who has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger. Upright men shall be astonished at this, for the Innocent shall stir up himself against the Hypocrite."

Numb. 35:33 "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it."

The Epistle Dedicatory

This work was too high for me; and, as it is now done by so weak a hand, is too low for so many judicious eyes to look down to. Yet, according to your command, I have published these notes, which I humbly present to you. They were once in your *ear*, they are now in your *eye*, and may the Lord ever keep them in your *hearts!* Solomon bids us "buy the truth," but does not tell us what it must cost, because we must get it, though it be ever so dear. We should love it both shining and scorching. The desire of my soul is, that you may deal so with those truths which here in all humbleness is presented to you. Oh, that we may be all doers of the word, and not hearers only, lest we deceive our own souls! When I stood upon my watch to see what the Lord would say unto me, that I might speak unto you a word in season, that is, with a due concurrence and observation of all circumstances, of time, place, people, etc., He directed me to make this discovery of upright hearts' progress in the ways of God, notwithstanding all afflictions, etc., which befall them; which gives me hope that God intended to send home into your hearts some light and influence from this truth, to encourage and keep up your spirits against all the opposition which you may find in the cause of God and the kingdom, and to maintain your zeal and forwardness therein, that justice and judgment may run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

If justice does not work the salvation of sinners' souls—yet it will work to the restraining of their sin—the measure of their wickedness will be less. And yet, I desire that justice and clemency may go together. Nero's speech has great praise, who, when he was to subscribe to the death of a man condemned, would say, "I wish I did not know how to write." I hope there be a generation that will not abuse that liberty that shall be granted them according to the word—but will, in the midst of all their liberties, be faithful servants to peace and concord, according to that which Calvin writes to Farel, "I hope God will arise in you, and cause you to do his work his own way." May the Lord God guide you, and give everyone of you to act like the angels of God—cheerfully, freely, readily, sincerely, and unweariedly in your generation, that in all your ways Christ may own you, and that all the godly of the land may rise up and call you blessed; and let the blessing of him who was in the bush be upon you and yours forever; and let all the precious sons of Zion who love the God of heaven, who is the Savior of this nation, say Amen.

In all humble service for Christ,
Thomas Brooks.

God's Delight in the Progress of the Upright

"Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from your ways."
Psalm 44:18.

The word that is rendered "heart," both in the Old and New Testament, does signify the understanding, mind, will, affections, conscience, the whole soul. "Our heart is not turned back." Our understandings and minds are the same as they were in a summer's day, though now we be in a winter's storm—though now we be afflicted, tossed, broken, and persecuted—yet notwithstanding, "our heart is not turned back"—our mind, will, affections, and conscience, our whole soul, is the same now as before. "Our heart is not turned backward, neither have our steps declined from your ways."

"Our heart is not turned back." This notes their progress in the ways of well-doing; for the old saying is, Not to go forward is to go backward. "Neither have our steps declined from your ways." It notes their settled course of walking in the ways of God; and, in short, the sum of all is, though we have been afflicted, tossed, broken and persecuted—yet our hearts have held on in the ways of the Lord, and we have not departed from our God. "Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from your ways."

There is but one observation that I shall speak to this day, and that is this: **Upright hearts will persevere in the ways of God, and in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all afflictions, troubles, and discouragements they meet with.** That is the sum and the scope of this verse here. The church was afflicted, tossed, broken, and persecuted; and yet this is still the theme of the song, "Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from your ways."

I judge it a point seasonable in every respect. I shall only eye the scriptures that prove it, and then open it to you. The scriptures that prove it are these: Psalm 119:23-24; Josh. 24:15; Neh. 4:13, 17 compared; Mal. 3:13-17; 2 Cor. 11:23-30. These scriptures speak out this truth, that upright hearts will persevere in the ways of God, and in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all the afflictions, troubles, and discouragements they meet with. For the opening of the point, I shall premise these three things—

First, I shall premise something concerning upright hearts.

Secondly, I shall premise something concerning the ways of God.

Thirdly, The reasons why upright hearts will persevere in the ways of God, in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all the afflictions, troubles, and discouragements they meet with.

1. I shall premise these four things concerning upright hearts—

1. First, An upright heart hates all SINS, even those which he cannot conquer; and he loves all divine TRUTHS, even those which he cannot practice. An upright heart, he hates all SIN. All sin strikes at God, at his holiness, as well as at an upright man's happiness. All sin strikes at God's glory, as well as at the soul's comfort; therefore the soul strikes at all sin. All sins, in the eye of an upright heart, are traitors to the crown and dignity of the Lord Jesus; therefore the soul rises in arms against all. An upright heart, he looks upon sin to be a universal evil. An upright heart, he looks upon sin as that which has thrown down the most *righteous* man in the world, as Noah; as that which has thrown down the best *believer* in the world, as Abraham; as that which has thrown down the best king in the world, as

David; as that which has thrown down the best *apostle* in the world, as Paul. It looks upon sin as that which has thrown down the *strongest*, as Samson; and the *wisest*, as Solomon; and the *meekest*, as Moses; and the *patientest*, as Job; and so his soul rises against it. In Psalm 119:104, "I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path." The original word signifies to hate with a deadly and irreconcilable hatred; to hate so as that nothing will satisfy but the destruction of the thing hated. It is the same Hebrew word that is used to express Absalom's hatred of Amnon for defiling of sister Tamar, "My soul hates him."

An unsound heart, a rotten heart, strikes at some sins—and yet falls in with others; he cries down pride and ignorance—and yet falls in with oppression and cruelty; he cries down tyranny and injustice in others—and yet plays the tyrant and unjust one himself. There are men who are blinded by Satan, and he has them by the hand, and the Lord knows where he will lead them.

And as an upright heart hates all sins, even those he cannot conquer, so an upright soul loves all **TRUTHS**, even those that he cannot practice. Every word of the Lord is just and righteous in the eye of an upright soul; he loves all truth strongly, though he can practice no truth but very weakly. Every word of grace is glorious, every line of grace is very glorious. Truth is sweetness to him; where one truth is sweet, there every truth is sweet to an upright soul. In Psalm 119:127-128, says David there, "I have loved your commandments above gold; yes, above fine gold: I esteem all your precepts concerning all things to be right." That is the first thing.

2. Secondly, Upright hearts serve God, and seek God more for that internal worth and that eternal good that is in him, than for any external good they receive from him. Just so, it was with upright Job. The devil, in Job 1, would gladly charge Job that his heart was not right with God, that God had made a hedge about him, and therefore Job served him. The Lord therefore gives Satan liberty to break down that hedge, that Job's uprightness might appear, and that it might appear to all the world, that Job served God for that internal and eternal worth that was in him—namely, holiness, wisdom, and goodness. Therefore, when that hedge was down, and Job was stripped of all—yet in ver. 21, "The Lord has given," says he, "and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Oh, upright Job served God for that internal and eternal worth that is in him; and therefore, though all his outward goods were lost, his soul could bless God.

But an unsound heart, a rotten heart, serves God and seeks good merely for some external good it has from him, or expects to receive by him. That is a true saying, "Few men seek God for himself—but for some other thing." Like those in Hosea 7:14, "When they howled," says God, "upon their beds, it was for grain, and wine, and oil, and they rebelled against me." It was not for any internal or eternal worth in me, it was not for that holiness, wisdom, faithfulness, purity, and glory that is in me—but they seek me for loaves, for grain, and wine, and oil, and they rebelled against me.

3. Upright hearts are most exercised and most busied and taken up about the inward man, about the inside—observing that, reforming that, examining that, watching that. An upright heart knows that his soul is Christ's throne, his chamber of presence; and therefore, above all, the upright heart is most diligent to observe that none sit upon that throne but Christ, and that none come into that chamber of presence but Christ, that no scepter be advanced there but the scepter of Christ; he is most careful of the inside. In Psalm 86:11, "Incline my *heart* to fear your name;" Psalm 119:36, "Let my heart be sound in your statutes;" and so in ver. 80 and ver. 112 of the same psalm.

Now an unsound heart, a rotten heart, is most taken up about the outside,—informing that, and reforming that, and watching of that—but as for the inside, there

is no eye cast to see how all stands there. The devil may bear rule; any may come into the soul and domineer and oppose the scepter of Christ. Just so, an unsound soul is taken up merely about the outside. That same exhortation of Solomon is strong upon an upright heart: Proverbs 4:23, "Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." The original has it more elegantly, "Before all, or above all keeping, keep your heart; for out of it is the goings forth of lives." This duty that Solomon presses, is a duty that an upright heart above all, endeavors to practice. Above all and before all, he guards his soul; he looks to his inward parts, how he thrives and grows, how he stands God-ward, Christ-ward, heaven-ward, and holiness-ward.

4. Upright hearts in their constant course are unwavering hearts. An upright heart in his constant course is an unwavering heart. All the ways of an upright soul are as commentaries one upon another; and look, "as face answers face," as Solomon speaks, so the ways of an upright heart do one answer another. Christ sits at the stern of the soul, and guides the soul into those ways which are most like to himself: 2 Chron. 34:2, "Josiah, he walked in all the ways of the Lord, as his father David did; he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left." In all his ways he behaved evenly.

But an unsound heart, a rotten heart, is a very wavering heart. You shall have one way wherein he walks to speak him out an angel, another to speak him a very sinful man, and a third to speak him a devil. Now he is for God, afterwards against God; now for justice and righteousness, at another time for injustice and unrighteousness. But an upright heart is an unwavering heart. Let heaven and earth meet, let trials come, temptations and afflictions come, he keeps his ground, he is an unwavering heart, So much concerning the first thing.

2. Secondly, concerning the WAYS of God, I shall briefly premise these five things—

1. First, The ways of God are RIGHTEOUS ways, the ways of God are BLESSED ways. Proverbs 8:20, "I lead in the way of righteousness, and in the midst of the paths of judgment;" and in the 33rd verse of that same chapter, "Hearken unto me now therefore, O you children, for blessed are those who keep your ways." The ways of God are *blessed* ways; they bring in temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings upon all who walk in them. They are *righteous* ways; they lead to righteousness, to the love of righteousness, to the practice of righteousness, to a delight in righteousness. As for the ways of profaneness, pride, hypocrisy, formality, and apostasy, these are none of the ways of God; they are unrighteous ways, cursed ways, and they bring nothing but curses and crosses upon all who walk in them. Those who walk in these ways are nowhere secure—but are every moment liable to the thunderbolts of divine displeasure.

2. Secondly, The ways of God are SOUL-REFRESHING ways. Oh, they yield the soul abundance of refreshing and sweetness, who walks in them. In Jer. 6:16, "Ask for the old way, the good old way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest,"—"you shall find refreshing to your souls," as the original has it. If a man's soul is tired and weary, the ways of the Lord will refresh it; if it is dead and dull, the ways of the Lord will quicken it; if he is fainting, the ways of the Lord will be as a cordial to him.

3. Thirdly, The ways of the Lord are TRANSCENDENT ways, ways that transcend all other ways. What is darkness, compared to light? What are pebbles, compared to pearls? What is dross, compared to gold? No more are the choicest ways of the creature, compared to the ways of God: 4:8-9, "My ways are not as your ways, nor my thoughts as your thoughts—but as high as the heavens are above the

earth, so are my thoughts above your thoughts, and my ways above your ways." What is said of wisdom, Proverbs 3:15, "that she is more precious than rubies, and that all the things we can desire are not to be compared to her," the same may be affirmed of the ways of God. Oh! they are more precious than rubies, and all other ways are not to be compared to them.

4. Fourthly, The ways of God are SOUL-STRENGTHENING ways, ways that yield strength to the soul. In Proverbs 10:29, "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright." That is—the way of the Lord makes strong. The original word signifies to confirm, to make strong. Oh, the ways of the Lord confirm upright hearts, they make upright hearts strong, strong to withstand temptations, strong to conquer corruptions, strong to rejoice under afflictions, strong to perform the most heavenly duties, strong to improve the most spiritual mercies. The ways of the Lord make strong, they confirm such hearts as walk in them.

5. Fifthly and lastly, the ways of the Lord are AFFLICTED, perplexed, and persecuted ways. Mat. 7:14, "Strait is the gate," etc. The original word signifies perplexed, afflicted, persecuted; and the way is made strait by afflictions and troubles and persecutions. And so in Acts 19:9, "This way is everywhere evil spoken of;" and in Acts 24:14, "In the way that you call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers." The ways of God are afflicted, persecuted, and perplexed ways. And so much for the second thing.

3. The REASONS why upright hearts will persevere in the ways of God, notwithstanding all the afflictions, troubles, and discouragements which befall them, are these—

1. The first is drawn from the nature of a Christian's life, which is a RACE. As he who runs a race, if he does not persevere, notwithstanding all discouragements, until he comes to the goal—he loses the garland; and as he who faints in wrestling loses the crown, so do those who hold not out to the end; therefore upright hearts will persevere to the end, notwithstanding all the discouragements they meet with in the ways of God: 1 Cor. 9:24, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." So in Heb. 12:1, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

2. A second ground of their persevering, notwithstanding all the afflictions and discouragements they meet with in the ways of God, and in the ways of well-doing, is drawn from the glorious promises of REWARD. For mark, as there is a *comforting* virtue in the promises, so there is a *quicken*ing and an *encouraging* virtue in all the glorious promises, as to warm the heart, so to raise and encourage the heart to run the ways of God's commandments, especially such promises as these: Rev. 2:10, "Satan shall cast some of you into prison: but fear not—but be faithful unto the death, and I will give you the crown of life." That crown is a sure crown, a matchless crown, a glorious crown, a lasting crown: "I will give you a crown of life." That is, "I who am faithfulness itself, I who am truth itself, I who am goodness itself, I who am power itself, I who have all in heaven and earth at my disposing—I myself will give you a crown of life!"

2 Tim. 4:8, "Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." The word that is rendered laid up signifies safely to lay up: it notes both a designation and a reservation. There is a crown designed and safely kept for me. And so such a promise as that, Rev. 3:5, "He who overcomes shall be arrayed in white: and I will not blot his name out of the book of life—but I will confess him before my Father, and before his angels." And in ver. 21 of the same chapter, "He who overcomes

shall sit down with me in my throne, as I overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne." That is another reason from the promises of reward.

Promises of reward to the mariners—oh, how do they raise up their spirits to go through any storms, to go through many dangers! and so does the glorious promises of reward which God makes to his people; they carry them bravely through all storms.

3. A third reason is, Because of all ways the ways of God are the most HONORABLE ways; therefore upright hearts will persevere in them, notwithstanding all the afflictions and discouragements they meet with. The most renowned and honored saints who ever breathed on earth, and who are now triumphant in heaven, have walked in those ways of God. The ways of *sin* are base, reproachful ways—but the ways of *God* are honorable ways.

When a man does but fancy that the way he walks in is an honorable way, alas! how is his spirit carried on in that way against all opposition that he meets with! Oh, how much more does the testimony that God gives of his ways, and the encouragements that he gives to his people to persevere in his ways, raise up their spirits to persevere against all discouragements.

4. But fourthly, The principal reason of upright hearts persevering in the ways of well-doing against all discouragements, is—because they are carried on in the ways of well-doing, and in the ways of God, from spiritual and internal causes—from spiritual principles, from a principle of inward life and spiritual power. It is true, if upright hearts were only carried on from fleshly, carnal, and external causes—they would wheel about, and turn apostates, and be base, and what not. But upright hearts are carried on in the ways of God from inward principles, as in Jer. 32:40, "I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall never depart from me."

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." Ezekiel 36:25-27. Upright hearts are carried on by an inward principle of fear, faith, and love, and this carries them bravely on against all the discouragements they meet with. In Isaiah 40:31, "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength like the eagle; they shall run and not be weary," because they run upon another's legs—namely, the Lord Christ's; "and they shall walk and not faint," because they walk in the strength of Christ. That is another reason.

5. The fifth and last reason of their persevering in the ways of God, notwithstanding all the discouragements which befall them—is drawn from the former profit and sweetness which they have found in the ways of God. Oh! upright souls have found by experience, the ways of God to be profitable ways indeed, to be the most gainful way that ever souls walked in. Upright hearts can say, "We went to prayer at such a time, and we met with Christ answering us! Oh! what a mercy was that!" And another time, "We went to the word, and we met with Jesus Christ embracing us. Oh! what a favor was that!" And another time, "We went to the communion of saints, and we met with Christ warming and inflaming our hearts; and oh, what a heaven was that!" As those in Luke 24:32, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us?" Oh! the remembrance of that former sweetness they have found carries them aloft against all discouragements!

The *kiss* that the king gave one, as the story speaks, was more than the *golden cup* he gave to the other. Oh, the spiritual kisses that the King of kings gives upright souls when he meets them in his ways, carries their souls continuously against all

afflictions and oppositions that they meet with. David says, in Psalm 116:2, "Because you have inclined your ear to me, therefore will I call on you as long as I live." Why? "Because you have inclined your ear to me, I will call on you as long as I live." In summer season and in winter season, let men smile or frown, I will call upon you as long as I live. The sweet gain and profit that mariners have found in such and such ways, does exceedingly carry their spirits on in those ways, notwithstanding all discouragements; and so does the sweetness that upright souls have found in the ways of God. And thus much for the reasons of the point, and for the doctrinal part.

4. We come now to the PRACTICAL APPLICATION, which is the main thing I have my eye upon, at this time.

1. Is it so, that upright hearts will persevere in the ways of God and the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all afflictions, troubles, and discouragements which may befall them? Then this, in the first place, serves to show us that the number of upright hearts are very few; for ah! how few are there, who keep close to the ways of God, and persevere in the ways of well-doing, when storms begin to rise! It is nothing for a man when he has wind and tide on his side, when there is concurrence of all secondary causes to lift a man up and carry him bravely on; it is nothing to persevere now in the ways of God and the ways of well-doing. Oh—but when a man is tossed and afflicted, broken and persecuted, now to persevere in the ways of well-doing, this is the glory of a Christian—but how few are there that persevere in these seasons! Oh! witness the treachery, witness the apostasy, witness the neutrality of men in our days, who, when storms begins, for fleshly ends, they wheel about.

2. Secondly, Is it so, that upright hearts will persevere in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all discouragements which befall them? I shall endeavor to apply the point more generally, to all who hear me at this time, knowing that it is a useful point for us all, especially in these times and seasons wherein God does exercise us with afflictions and discouragements, while we are in his own ways. The exhortation that I shall press upon you all is, that you will persevere in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all the afflictions, troubles, and discouragements which may befall you.

Now that you may, I shall endeavor to do these two things—

First, To lay down some motives to encourage you.

Secondly, To premise some directions to further help you.

1. For the first, by way of **motives to encourage you** to persevere against all discouragements that possibly may befall you, consider these few things—

1. First of all, Consider this, that all the afflictions and troubles that you meet with shall never hurt nor harm you—but be very advantageous to you. All the arrows that wicked men shoot at your heads shall stick fast in their own hearts: 1 Peter 3:13, "And who shall harm you, if you are followers of that which is good?" Interrogations are strong affirmations. It is a strong affirmation, "none shall harm you!" Devils nor men, let them roar and rage, none shall harm you. For as one speaks truly, "No man is properly hurt but by himself and his own fault." All the afflictions and troubles which you shall meet with in the ways of well-doing, they shall be advantageous to you; they shall be a means by which God will convey more of his grace and mercy, more of himself and his glory into your souls: Hosea 2:14, "I will allure her into the wilderness, and then I will speak friendly to her"—or as the Hebrew has it, I will earnestly speak to her heart. God will make all afflictions, even a wilderness, to be an inlet to more of his own self. All the discouragements that you meet with in the ways of well-doing shall but rub off your dross, and empty

out that filth that is in you, and so make more room for more of himself and of his glory to be communicated to you.

Heb. 12:10, "But he afflicts us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness." They were before partakers of his holiness. Oh—but God will make afflictions conduit-pipes, through which he will convey more of himself and of his holiness to his children's souls. That is the first thing. All the afflictions which befall you shall not harm you—but be very advantageous to you. Who would not then persevere in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding any trouble or affliction that may befall them?

2. Secondly, beloved, let all gracious and upright hearts consider this, that Jesus Christ has held on in a way of mercy and sweetness towards you, notwithstanding all the discouragements and all the hindrances which have been in his way; and will not you persevere in ways of duty to Christ, who has held on, notwithstanding all discouragements, in a way of mercy towards you? Oh consider, consider what difficulties the Lord Jesus Christ has gone over to come to your souls. In Cant. 2:8, it is said there, "It is my beloved that comes leaping over the mountains and skipping over the hills." Oh, the Lord Jesus Christ has come over mountains of *wrath*, and mountains of *sin*, and mountains of *sorrow*—and all that he might come to your souls. In Isaiah 63:3, "I have trod the wine-press alone." He trod the wine-press of the wrath of his Father alone. And so in Isaiah 50:5-6, "The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned my back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheek to those who pluck off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." Oh, the Lord, in a way of mercy towards you, has come over all difficulties. Jesus Christ never pleaded, "Oh this mountain of wrath, of sin, and sorrow is too high for me to go over: and these valleys of darkness are too long and too terrible for me to walk through." Oh no! but the Lord came skipping over all mountains, and all for the good of your souls.

And will not you, upright hearts, persevere in ways of duty to him who has thus acted in ways of mercy to you? And as he has, so he does still persevere in ways of mercy to you, notwithstanding all your provocations and unworthy walking of former mercies. Yet still he holds on in ways of mercy and kindness to you. Witness all those mercies which now you enjoy, the clothes that you wear, and the bread that you eat, and the house that you lodge in, and the bed that you lie on—when thousands are laying down in the everlasting sorrow of hell. Oh, this should bespeak you to persevere in his ways, notwithstanding any difficulties that you may meet with.

3. But then, in the third place, Let all upright hearts seriously consider this, that wicked and ungodly men persevere in ways of impiety, notwithstanding all the discouragements that they meet with from God; and will not you who are upright, persevere in ways of piety, notwithstanding all the discouragements and afflictions that you may meet with from men? Wicked and ungodly men, they persevere in ways of wickedness, notwithstanding all the afflictions, and troubles, and discouragements which God exercises them with. God lashes their consciences, and passes the sentence of death upon all their comforts. Afflictions comes upon them as Job's messengers, one upon the neck of another; and yet they remain proud still, and hypocritical still, and treacherous still, and apostates still, and profane still. O upright hearts, will not you persevere in the ways of piety, notwithstanding the discouragements that you meet with from men? Shall wicked men persevere in the ways of wickedness, notwithstanding all discouragements, though God chides them and set his angel in the way to draw a sword upon them, and crushes their bones against the wall, as he dealt with Balsam, Num. 22:25; shall wicked men, Balaam-like, ride on though the angel of the Lord draw his sword; and will not you, when men draw their swords, persevere in the ways of well-doing?

4. Fourthly, Consider solemnly of that agreement that you made with Jesus Christ, when you first took Jesus Christ upon the day of your marriage with Christ. Oh, there is enough in that to engage you to persevere against all the discouragements you shall meet with! Oh remember, upright souls, in the day of your marriage with Jesus Christ, you covenanted with the Lord Jesus Christ to keep close to him, to persevere in his ways. Then you did say in effect to Christ what Ruth said to Naomi, Ruth 1:14-16, "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your God shall be my God; and nothing but death shall part between you and me." When you first gave yourself to Jesus Christ, in that day your souls were really married to Christ, then you covenanted with the Lord Jesus Christ, and in effect said thus, "O blessed Lord! I will follow you wherever you go; where you go I will go; and where you lodge I will lodge; and your God shall be my God; and nothing shall part between you and my soul, between your ways and my heart;" therefore let that bespeak you to persevere in ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all afflictions and discouragements you meet with.

5. And then again, in the next place, Let upright hearts consider this, that God knows how to deliver from troubles by troubles; he knows how to deliver from afflictions by afflictions; and God will by lesser afflictions which befall his people, deliver them from greater afflictions; and by those troubles which befall them, he will deliver them from greater troubles. I remember a saying of Anaxagoras, who seeing great possessions which he had lost, speaks thus, "Had not those things perished," says he, "I could not have been safe." God will so order all the afflictions and troubles which befall you in the ways of the Lord, that your soul shall say, "Oh, had I not met with this affliction—I would have been undone; had I not been undone—I would have been undone; had not these troubles and sorrows and discouragements befallen me—it had been worse with me. God will deliver his people, mark it, from spiritual afflictions and spiritual judgments, by the temporal afflictions and troubles which befall them. By those afflictions that you meet with in the ways of well-doing, God will deliver you from that security, pride, formality, dead-heartedness, lukewarmness, and censoriousness that otherwise might fall upon you.

I remember a story of a godly man, that as he was going to board the ship for France, he broke his leg; and it pleased providence so to order it, that the ship that he would have gone in at that very time was sunk, and not a man saved; so by breaking a bone his life was saved. Thus is the dealing of the Lord with his people; sometimes he exercises them with afflictions—it may be he breaks their bones; ay—but it is in order to the saving of their lives.

6. And then again consider, that all the afflictions, troubles, and discouragements which befall you, shall never rob you of your treasure, of your jewels. They may rob you of some slight, light things; as the flower that is in your hat—but they cannot rob you, they cannot strip you of your choice jewels and treasures. The jewels and treasures of an upright heart—are the spiritual presence of God, union with Christ, communion with Christ, joy that is unspeakable and glorious, peace that passes understanding, spiritual comfort, the least drop of which is more worth than a world. Now all the afflictions and troubles which befalls you, can never rob you of your jewels; your treasure is safe. They may rob you of the flower in your cap—but your jewel is safe. Some slight, poor, outward comforts they may rob you of. Oh—but your jewels is safe, your treasure is still safe.

What an encouragement it is to a poor traveler to persevere his way, when he remembers that all the thieves and enemies that he meets with, which cannot rob him of his treasures, of his jewels! O upright hearts! Your jewel is safe, your treasure is safe, and all the powers of darkness can never rob you of your God, of your Christ, of your comfort, of your inward peace; therefore persevere against all discouragements and afflictions that you shall meet with.

7. Then again, in the next place, consider that your persevering in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all discouragements and afflictions that may befall you, is very acceptable to God; and it tends much to the glory and honor of God, for his people to persevere in the ways of well-doing against all discouragements that may befall them. The church of Pergamos persevered, and the Lord was pleased with it: Rev. 2:13, "I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives."

The Lord here was much affected and pleased with the constancy of the church, that it held on in his worship and ways, notwithstanding the discouragements and troubles that she met with. It is very honorable to God. Oh! it is an honor to the power of God, to the wisdom of God, to the goodness of God, by persevering in his ways against all oppositions; you declare to the world that there is no God like your God, and no ways like his ways; nor any encouragements like those which he gives; therefore persevere in the ways of well-doing against all discouragements.

8. But in the eighth and last place, do but **consider the dangerous nature of apostasy**; and if there were no other argument to move men to persevere in the ways of God, in the ways of well-doing, against all discouragements and troubles that may befall them—yet this alone may carry their hearts bravely on against all troubles and afflictions. Consider the dangerous nature of apostasy. If you would judge of the dangerous nature of apostasy aright, you may do it by these few things

[1.] First, Consider what you fall from by apostatizing from God, from his truth, and from his ways. Oh! consider that of all falls, the falls of such apostates are the most dangerous falls. You who play the apostate, and turn from the ways of God, and from the ways of well-doing—you fall from God, who is the greatest good; you fall from his ways, which are the crown and the glory of the soul; and from his truth, the least tittle of which is more worth than heaven and earth. Alas! what are the falls of others, compared to your falls! Alexander the Third, he fell from a pope to be a gardener in Venice; and Valerian fell from a golden chair to an iron cage; and Dionysius fell from a king to be a schoolmaster; and Nebuchadnezzar fell from a mighty prince to be a beast—but what are these falls to your falls, O apostate! who fall from heaven to hell—from the greatest good to the greatest evil!

We live in an apostatizing age; men wheel and turn about as second causes work, and are not steadfast with their God. These are days wherein grapes are turned into thorns, and figs into thistles; wherein men who were persecuted by others, turn persecutors of others; and men who were smitten by others, now by their pens and tongues bitterly smite others, even their fellow-brethren. These are days wherein lambs are turned into lions, and doves are turned into serpents; and men who have acted like angels, are turned to act like devils in respect of their rage and malice against God and his children, and against those ways wherein his people do walk. They are like the taxus plant of India, which the first year bears fruit, the second year leaves, and the third year poison. Thus it is with apostates of our time. For a time they bear fruit, a little after leaves, and now at last poison, the worst of all. Oh, consider the danger of apostasy! By apostasy you fall from the greatest good, and from the present hope of mercy, and from the future hope of glory; for there is no sin that does so strip a man of the present hope of mercy, and the future hope of glory, as the sin of apostasy: witness Spira, Judas, etc.

[2.] Then again, in the second place, judge of the dangerous nature of apostasy by the judgments of God that have fallen upon apostates, as upon Julian, Judas, Spira, etc. I remember Mr. Foxe makes mention of a smith in King Edward the Sixth's days, who was instrumental to convert a young man; the young man being clapped

in prison for the gospel's sake, sent for the smith, and asked him whether he would encourage him to stand for the truth, and to burn for religion; he answered, his cause was good, and he should do well to suffer for his religion—but for his part he could not bring his heart over to burn for religion. But a little time after his shop was set on fire, and he was burned in the midst of it. Oh! it would take up more time than is now allotted to me to set out the judgments of God that have befallen apostates that have been treacherous and base to God, to his ways, to his saints, and to the trust reposed in them.

[3.] Again, you may judge of the danger of apostasy by its near bordering upon the sin against the Holy Spirit, and by the exceeding difficulty of a man's recovering his ground, when he has once played the apostate, and turned his back upon God and his ways. Of all sins, the sin of apostasy comes nearest the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit. That soul that has turned his back upon God and his truth, and the ways of well-doing, because of discouragements, is now upon the borders of that sin, that if God leaves him but a little, he may fall into, and then he shall never rise again; which speaks out the dangerous nature of it.

[4.] And to shut up all, judge of the dangerous nature and evil of apostasy by this, that it renders all a man's former righteousness, doings, and sufferings invalid and lost: Ezek. 18:24, "If a man forsakes his righteousness, shall he live?" "No," says God, "he shall die"—ay, die with a witness: "in his iniquity which he has committed he shall die, and his righteousness shall be mentioned no more." There shall be no more talk—"This was a gallant man for God, and this man stood bravely up for his people and his ways." There shall be no mention of this, if a man plays the apostate. There shall be no pleading—This was once a worthy man, and stood gloriously to it. But now he is turned an apostate: he is turned away from God and his ways. All his righteousness, all his former actings and doings and sufferings shall be lost, and they shall never go to the grave with him, nor follow him to the judgment-seat of Christ: his apostasy shall follow him indeed—but for his former works of piety, they are all lost. As a soldier when he forsakes his colors and runs to the enemy, all his former good service is lost and buried in oblivion; so men who profess love to God and his people, and at last meet with difficulties and play the apostate, this their apostasy renders all their former service lost.

Thus much by way of motive to move you, all you who hear me this day, to persevere in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all the afflictions and discouragements that you may meet with in the ways of well-doing.

I shall now lay down a few DIRECTIONS. I shall be brief in them, and so draw towards a close.

1. First, if you would persevere in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all discouragements and afflictions, in which you must expect to have your share as well as others, and perhaps the greatest, therefore it stands you the more upon to consider of those things that may be of use to bear up your spirits bravely, to carry you through all the trials and troubles you may meet with. To that purpose,

(1.) There are some things that you must carefully **DECLINE**.

(2.) There are other things that you must carefully practice.

If you will persevere in the ways of well-doing against all oppositions, and notwithstanding all the afflictions and troubles that you may meet with, then,

[1.] First, **Take heed of unbelief.** There is nothing in the world that does more damp the heart, that ties the tongue, that binds the hands, that puts fetters on the feet, that puts out the eyes—than unbelief. Unbelief blinds the eyes, it ties a man's

hands, and causes a sad and fearful damp to fall upon his heart. It renders the man utterly unfit to walk in the ways of God, especially when there is a lion in the way, and when the storm begins to rise: Heb. 3:13, "Take heed lest there be found in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God." Unbelief will carry a man to apostasy. It has been the great reason of many men's apostasy and backsliding from God and his ways—that they could not hang on God and trust in God by faith—but unbelief was prevalent, and has carried them from God and all just ways. Therefore take heed of unbelief.

[2.] Secondly, If you would persevere in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all the discouragements you may meet with, **take heed of an inordinate love to the things of this life**. This made Judas and Demas to play the apostate, and Spira play the apostate. "Demas has forsaken us" to embrace this present world. He looked upon the world in its pomp, beauty, and glory; and his heart falls off from God and his ways. I remember it is storied of Henry the Fourth of France asking the Duke of Alva whether he had seen the eclipses; he answered, he had so much business to do on earth, that he had no time to look up to heaven. A man whose heart is engaged to the love of the world, will find so much to do in the world, that, with that wicked duke, he will have no time to look up to heaven for strength, to walk in heavenly and holy ways against opposition. It was a good saying of Augustine, "Surely they do not love Christ, who love anything more than Christ!" If your hearts are pitched more upon the world, and are engaged more to it than to Christ, you will never be able to persevere in the ways of well-doing.

[3.] Thirdly, If you would persevere in the ways of well-doing, **take heed of consulting with flesh and blood**. Take heed of listening and hearkening to carnal reason and carnal counsel; which has turned many a man out of the ways of God. When Paul was brought in to Christ—Gal. 1:14-16, "When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, to call me by his grace," as to send me to preach the gospel among the heathen, "immediately I consulted not with flesh and blood." If he had consulted with flesh and blood, he might have made several objections to have kept him off; "but I consulted not with flesh and blood:" flesh would have told him that the work was too high, too hard, too dangerous for him. "Oh but," says he, "I consulted not with flesh and blood."

[4.] Lastly, If you would persevere, notwithstanding all discouragements that may befall you, then **take heed of judging of the ways of God**, and of the ways of well-doing, by the opinion which wicked men have of them. Alas! wicked men are blind, and see not the beauty and loveliness that is in the ways of God. Wicked men are malicious against the ways of God, and will never speak well of them.

But again, If you would walk in the ways of well-doing against all discouragements, then as you must labor carefully to decline all those things—so you must labor to put in **PRACTICE** these things—

[1.] **Frequently and solemnly cast up what you have gained by walking in the ways of God**. Frequently and solemnly cast up your accounts, and see what you have gained by walking in the ways of God. Look over that power against corruptions, that strength to withstand temptations, that power to rejoice in afflictions, which you have gained in the ways of God. Look often over that "peace that passes understanding," and that heavenly joy and those blessed consolations which you have gained in the ways of God and in the ways of well-doing. When the mariner and the shopkeeper cast their eye upon their former gains, it encourages and enables their spirits to persevere against all the discouragements and troubles they may meet with in their way; and so it will do with you.

[2.] In the second place, **See that you act and walk in the ways of God, and in the ways of well-doing, from internal and spiritual principles.** Oh, I beseech you, all who hear me this day, as you would persevere in the ways of well-doing, look to your principles, that you act from spiritual and internal principles, from the power of the Spirit and the breathings of the Spirit, from love to God and a holy fear of God; and this will carry you bravely on against all discouragements you shall meet with. If you act from carnal and fleshly principles, and for carnal ends, as for honor or favor or profit, etc., you will never be constant in the ways of God—but when these ends cannot be answered, you will turn apostates, and turn back from God. Therefore, as you would persevere, look to your principles, that they may be sound.

[3.] Then, in the third place, If you would persevere in the ways of well-doing and in the ways of God, notwithstanding all the afflictions and troubles which may befall you, **labor to exercise faith.** Faith is a singular means to enable us to walk in the ways of God against all the discouragements which may befall us. I shall open it in those two things, which are worthy of your consideration. Faith will carry the soul through all discouragements and difficulties that the soul can meet with in the ways of God.

First, By being conversant about soul-greatening objects. Mark, this is One way by which faith enables the soul to persevere against

all discouragements, is by raising the soul to converse with soul-greatening objects, such as God and Christ, and those treasures, pleasures, and sweetnesses which are in the Lord Jesus Christ. Just so, in 2 Cor. 4 the last three verses, "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." How so? "We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Faith is conversant about unseen realities. While we keep a fixed eye upon future glory—while our faith is conversant upon that crown which never fades, upon those robes which never wither, upon that kingdom which can never be shaken—"inwardly we are being renewed day by day," and heavy afflictions are made light, and long afflictions are made short.

Thus faith enables the soul, and carries it bravely on against all discouragements, by conversing with soul-greatening objects. There is nothing which so enables the soul, and which so divinely greatens the soul and makes it too large, too wide, and too big for troubles and afflictions to discourage, than faith's conversing with those high and glorious eternal realities.

Second, Then faith does this, in the second place, by appropriating all to itself that it lays hands upon. Faith looks on God, and says with the psalmist, "This God is my God forever and ever; and he shall be my guide unto death." Faith looks on Christ, and says with Thomas, "My Lord and my God." Faith looks on the promises, and says, "These precious promises are mine." It casts an eye upon the crown of righteousness, and says with Paul, "Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." It looks upon all treasures, pleasures, and sweetness which are in Christ, and which are by Christ prepared for the soul, and says faith, "Those treasures are mine, those pleasures are mine, and all that sweetness that is in Christ is mine." Thus faith carries on the soul against all the discouragements which the soul can meet with.

[4.] Then again, in the next place, If you would persevere in the ways of well-doing, **labor to increase and abound in LOVE.** Oh let your love to God and love to his ways be augmented and increased! Oh look that love does its part, and then the soul will persevere! Cant. 8:6-7, "Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his

house for love, it would be utterly scorned." Now I shall show you how love will enable the soul to persevere in the ways of God, and in the ways of well-doing, against all discouragements: and that it will do thus,

[1.] First, By egging all other graces on to act and operate. Love is a very active grace. It is the great wheel in the soul, which sets all other graces on work. Love is like to the virtuous woman, Proverbs 9:3, who sets all her maidens at work. Where love is strong in the soul, there no grace shall be idle in the soul. There love will call upon the other graces, "Faith, do you lay persevere that God and on that crown that is set before you. Patience, do wait on God, etc." It calls on all, and sets all on work. And now the more grace is acted, the more its strength is increased; and the more its strength is increased, the more the soul is enabled to walk in the ways of God, against all discouragements that does or can befall the soul. And,

[2.] Secondly, Love will enable you to persevere in the ways of God against all discouragements, by rendering all the ways of God sweet and pleasant to the soul. Love renders those ways sweet, which men who have no love to Christ, look on as bitter ways. "Every way is sweet and pleasant," says love, "his yoke is easy and his way is pleasant!" As it is in Proverbs 17, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." In the abstract Love says, "This way is a precious way, and the other way of God, oh it is a heavenly way; I find much sweetness in it," says Love. And thus it encourages the soul to persevere in the ways of well-doing. For the more sweet and lovely the ways of God are presented to the soul, the more the soul is raised and encouraged to persevere in those ways of God, notwithstanding any affliction and trouble which the soul meets with.

I remember I have read a story of a Dutch schoolmaster, who said, "Were all the world a lump of gold, and in my hand to dispose of, I would lay it down at my enemy's feet, that with freedom and liberty I might live and walk in the ways of God, they are so lovely to my soul."

[3.] And then, thirdly, Love, it will enable the soul to persevere in the ways of well-doing against all discouragements, by putting a blessed interpretation, and a heavenly construction upon all the afflictions, sorrows, and discouragements which an upright heart can meet with in the ways of God. All the afflictions and discouragements which upright hearts meet with, love will thus interpret and expound: "Oh! all those afflictions are but means that God will use to rub off my dross and filth, to convey more of himself! They are all my friends, and shall work for my good! All those cursings God will turn to blessings," says Love. "All these afflictions which befall me, are but out of some noble designs that God has to reveal more of himself and of his glory to me. It is but that he may empty me more of myself and of the creature, so that he may communicate more of his own sweetness and fullness to my soul," says Love. "I know, though for the present it is bitter—yet," says Love, "it will be sweet in the end. I know the way to the crown by the cross, and I know all those afflictions shall lead me to more heavenly enjoyments of God!"

This construction David made concerning Shimei's cursing of him, 2 Sam. 16:12: when Shimei cursed him, David expounds it sweetly: ver. 12, "The Lord," says he, "will look on my affliction, and requite good for his cursing this day." This interpretation carries David along on his way, notwithstanding Shimei's cursing of him. "Oh! the Lord will turn the curse into a blessing!" says Love; and this carries him on bravely. Just so, in that 1 Cor. 13:5, "Love thinks no evil." It will put a sweet interpretation on all the afflictions which befall the soul; and the more sweet and heavenly interpretation Love makes of afflictions which befall the soul in the ways of God, the more the soul is raised and encouraged. "Well," says the soul, "if it is so, I will go on though the lions roar, etc." That is another means; if you will persevere

in the ways of well-doing, then look that Love do its part—let Love be operative and working in your souls.

[5.] Lastly, I have but one thing more that I will press as to this, and so draw towards a close, and that is this, **Look frequently and solemnly upon that "cloud of witnesses" who have gone before you.** It is the apostle's own argument, Heb. 12:1-2, he brings down all those instances in the 11th chapter, and sets them before their eyes, and encourages them from that very consideration, "To run the race that was set before them with patience, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God." Oh, look upon those glorious worthies who held on in the ways of well-doing. Look upon Nehemiah, who held on bravely; and David, who though princes scorned him and persecuted him—yet he held on in the ways of well-doing. Just so, Paul and Jeremiah, etc., notwithstanding all their tossings, afflictions, and sufferings—yet held on in the ways of well-doing. Oh, why should you degenerate basely from those examples which are your crown and glory to follow?

So much by way of **direction**, as to enable you to persevere in the ways of well-doing against all discouragements that may befall you.

Now, Sirs, give me only permission to premise a few things to your considerations, desiring that those considerations may be your daily meditations; and so I shall close at this time.

[1.] The first thing I desire to present to your considerations is this, The doing of great things is most worthy of great men. Great men should do great things, and account themselves little. Oh Sirs, that by your means "the angel with the everlasting gospel in his hand might fly through our heavens," Rev. 14:6; especially that he might fly through those dark corners of the kingdom where thousands sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death! O, God is now about a glorious design to exalt his Son, and the children unborn shall rise and call you blessed, if you will be instrumental to further this design; and it were better that you had never been born, than that you should be instrumental to hinder those poor souls from enjoying the means of grace, who cry out, "Bread, bread for our souls!" who say, "Look upon us, and see if there is any sorrow like our souls' sorrow; if there is any darkness like that darkness which is upon us; if there is any grievance like that which is in us!"

The doing of great things is most worthy of great men. May the Lord stir up your hearts that you may further that glorious work; and may the Lord direct you that you may pitch on some way or other whereby those who sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, may be enlightened, and Christ revealed, and his kingdom exalted in this kingdom!

[2.] A second consideration that I premise for your meditation is this, That the saints are very dear and precious to the Lord Jesus Christ, and those who shelter them, he will shelter. They are his *jewels*, Mal. 3:17. The word there rendered jewels, signifies such particular treasures that he loves and lays up for himself, and for special use. They are "the apple of his eye," Zech. 2:8; their *service* is precious to him, Proverbs 15:8; their *voice* is precious, Cant. 2:14, "Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely;" their *tears* are precious, Psalm 56:8, "He puts them in his bottle;" and their *names* are precious, for he "writes them in his book," Luke 10:20; their very *thoughts* are precious, Mal. 3:16; and their *blood* is precious, Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," and those who shelter them, God will shelter.

Ebed-melech sheltered Jeremiah in the day of the king's wrath, and God sheltered him in the day of God's wrath; Rahab sheltered the spies, and the Lord sheltered Rahab; Obadiah sheltered the prophets, and the Lord sheltered him. Sirs, God has made you in some blessed measure instrumental to shelter his people; and certainly that has been one great reason that God has sheltered you, notwithstanding all the designs, plots, and treacheries of men to destroy you. You have sheltered the saints, and God has sheltered you. They are always precious to him, and they should be always precious to you.

[3.] A third consideration for every day's meditation is, That it is very destructive and dangerous for the powers of this world to engage against the saints of God. I plead for all saints which Jesus Christ has stamped his image upon, whom he has taken into union and communion with himself. And I say it has been an old design of the devil to dash the powers of this world in pieces, by engaging them against the saints and servants of Christ. Little did Pharaoh know that the devil was in that design when he pursued Israel, "I will rise and pursue and overtake, my lust shall be satisfied;" but this was Pharaoh's destruction. His engaging against Israel was his overthrow. Haman engaged against the Jews—but this engagement against them was Haman's destruction, as you know.

Those princes (Dan. 6) who engaged against Daniel, and found nothing against him but in the matter of his God, you know their very engagement against him was their destruction. It is dangerous and destructive to the powers of this world for them to engage against the saints of God. I will only point at two or three scriptures Isaiah 8:8-10, "Associate yourselves together, O you people, and you shall be broken in pieces." The word "broken" in the Authorised Version, is twice more repeated, "You shall be broken in pieces, you shall be broken in pieces;" but in the Hebrew it is three times more repeated, "You shall be thrown down, you shall be thrown down, you shall be thrown down;" or "You shall be confounded, you shall be confounded, you shall be confounded,"—Why? "For God is with us," ver. 10.

Just so, in Zech. 12:2-3, "Jerusalem shall be a cup of trembling;" or "a cup of poison to all the nations round about; and though all the people of the earth should gather together against her, they shall be dashed in pieces:" Isaiah 54:17, "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that rises in judgment against you shall you condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, says the Lord."

[4.] Again, a fourth consideration for your daily meditation is this, That the *power* of godliness infinitely transcends and excels all *forms* of godliness. Alas! what is the *shadow*, compared to the *substance*? what is the *shell*, compared to the *kernel*? what is the *box*, compared to the *jewel* that is in it? No more are *forms* of godliness, compared to the *power* of godliness. What is darkness, compared to light? What are pennies, compared to gold? What is earth, compared to heaven? No more are forms of godliness, compared to the power of godliness; which does bespeak you to cherish, nourish, and countenance the power of godliness; and not so to advance forms of godliness as to throw down the power and the glory of holiness.

It is the power of godliness, which is the *honor* of a nation; it is the power of godliness that is the *beauty* of a nation; it is the power of godliness that is the *safety* of a nation. As you would have joy in life, and peace in death, and boldness before Christ's judgment-seat, oh look to this, that you *advance* the power of godliness, that you *countenance* the power of godliness, that you *cherish* and *nourish* the power of godliness. Take heed of stamping *divine law* on anything that Christ has not in capital letters stamped *divine law* upon. Oh take heed of giving a two-edged sword into the hands of any who are hot for *forms* of godliness, and who love to lord it over the faith and consciences of the saints, lest they cut off all who are higher than themselves in spiritual enjoyments of God, and stretch out all who are

shorter than themselves in forms of godliness. I am apt to think that if such men were more careful and skillful in using the sword of the Spirit, they would not be so hot for a temporal sword, neither would they be so angry for the lack of it, as they are. A spiritual sword is most suitable to spiritual men, and most suitable to all that spiritual work that God requires of them.

God is most exalted, Christ is most honored, the Spirit is most rejoiced, the mouths of the wicked are most stopped, and the saints are most gladdened by the *power* of godliness—by countenancing, advancing, and cherishing of that. Therefore, as you would have the Lord exalted and lifted up, and made famous and glorious, oh let the power of godliness be countenanced and cherished throughout the kingdom!

The way of instructing the people of the nation, I leave it with you whom it most concerns, desiring the Lord to direct you into such ways as may be most for the honor of his name, and for the happiness and comfort of the land we live in. That is another consideration.

[5.] In the next place, consider this, God has, and God will save his people and ruin their enemies, by very weak, unlikely, and contemptible means, and by very hidden and mysterious ways. He has done it: witness his leading of Israel by the hand through the Red Sea, and overthrowing their enemies in a mysterious way. Witness his destroying of that mighty army of the Midianites—which were a multitude without number—by Gideon's three hundred men. The story you have in Judges 6 and 7, compared. Witness his delivering his people and ruining their grand enemy, Haman, by Esther's attempting that which was directly against the law of the land, Esther 4:10, 16. Haman had plotted the ruin of the Jews; all was agreed on; the writings were signed; there was but a step between death and the Jews. Esther adventures and throws herself upon God's providence, and comes to the court, directly cross to the law of the land, to the letter of the law; and by this untrodden way, which one would have thought might have enraged the king to have cut her and her people off—yet, by this untrodden way, delivered his poor people.

I will give you but only two or three texts: Isaiah 41:14-16, "Fear not, worm Jacob, and you men of Israel." "Fear not, you worm Jacob." The original signifies a *very little worm*. "And you men of Israel," that is, "you dead men of Israel." What follows? "Behold, I will make you a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: you shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff. You shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and you shall rejoice in the Lord, and shall glory in the Holy One of Israel." Mountains are high, you know, and mountains are mighty, and mountains are strong; and so are the powers of the world; and yet little worms and dead men shall thresh these mountains, they shall overthrow and bring under even the powers which are high and strong and mighty against Jesus Christ and his ways, as we see this day. He will save his people, and destroy his enemies, though they be mighty and powerful, and in very untrodden and mysterious ways—by little worms, by dead men.

Just so, likewise Dan. 2:33-34, "While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth." Compare those verses with the 44th and 45th verses, "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever!" All the kingdoms which are against the kingdom of Christ shall be broken in pieces by this little kingdom.

"But now many nations are gathered against you. They say, "Let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion!" But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand his plan, he who gathers them like sheaves to the threshing floor. "Rise and thresh, O Daughter of Zion, for I will give you horns of iron; I will give you hoofs of bronze and you will break to pieces many nations." You will devote their ill-gotten gains to the Lord, their wealth to the Lord of all the earth." Micah 4:11-13. Many nations are gathered together against you, that say, Let her be defiled, let her be polluted and profaned, and let our eyes look upon Zion. Oh—but they know not the thoughts of the Lord, what a design God is about, and what a project he has in hand to advance his name, and to deliver his people and ruin their enemies, and that by the most unlikely and contemptible means that can be!

Therefore, let not men wonder at such and such strange providences as sometimes fall out—but rather consider that God has, and he will save his people, and ruin their enemies—by very dark and mysterious ways, and by contemptible and unlikely means; and this he will do, so that no flesh may boast, and that his people may live a life of faith, and that their enemies may be the more dreadfully ashamed and confounded; and mainly that his own name may be alone exalted and magnified.

[6.] Lastly, it is the earnest desires of the people of God generally, that your hands may further be strengthened, and that your souls may be lifted up in the ways of the Lord, that justice and righteousness may run down now at the last among us as mighty streams. Now, as to this, give me only leave to premise these two cautions, and so I shall have done—

First, do justice—but do it with much pity and mercy. Oh! weep over those wounds which the sword of justice makes; mourn over those bones which the sword of justice breaks; lament over those members which the sword of justice cuts off. Look! as justice and mercy meet in God, and kiss in God, and act harmoniously in God; so let justice and mercy meet, and kiss, and act harmoniously in you.

Secondly, look to this, that you do justice from principles of uprightness, and from the love of justice and righteousness. Otherwise, remember this, that God may revenge that blood upon you—if you do not justice out of a love of righteousness, and from principles of uprightness. It is very considerable in Hosea 1:4-5, "And the Lord said unto him, Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel." Consider this, that which Jehu did, God himself bears witness to it: 2 Kings 10:30, "And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because you have done well in executing that which is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your children to the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." Jehu, for the matter of justice, did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. God here approves of it—but Jehu did not do justice from a love of justice, and a principle of uprightness. The matter was good—but his principles were bad. Therefore God tells him that he will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu. May the Lord make you wise to consider of these things!

What I have here delivered, has been in the discharge of my conscience, that I may give up my account at last with joy, and not with grief; and so I shall conclude with that saying of Augustine, *"Not everyone who spares us is a friend, nor everyone who strikes us is an enemy."*