

HOW TO
WALK
WITH GOD

LETTERS

BY

JOHN NEWTON

Letters by John Newton.

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How to walk with God.

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Dear sir,

A simple dependence upon the teaching and influence of the good Spirit of God, so as not to supersede the use of appointed means, would, if it could be uniformly maintained, make every part of duty easy and successful. It would free us from much solicitude, and prevent many mistakes. Methinks I have a subject in view already, a subject of great importance to myself, and which perhaps will not be displeasing to you—**How to walk with God in the daily occurrences of life, so as to do everything for his sake and by his strength.**

When we are justified by faith, and accepted in the Beloved—we become heirs of everlasting life; but we cannot know the full value of our privileges, until we enter upon the state of eternal glory. For this, most who are converted have to wait some time after they are partakers of grace. Though the Lord loves them, hates sin, and teaches them to hate it—he appoints them to remain a while in a sinful world, and to groan under the burden of a depraved nature. He could put them in immediate possession of the heaven for which he has given them a fitness—but he does not. He has a service for them here; an honor which is worth all they can suffer, and for which eternity will not afford an opportunity, namely—to be instruments of promoting his designs, and manifesting his grace in the world. Strictly speaking, this is the whole of our business here, the only reason why life is prolonged, or for which it is truly desirable, that we may fill up our connections and situations, improve our comforts and our crosses, in such a manner as that God may be glorified in us and by us.

As he is a bountiful Master and a kind Father, he is pleased to afford a variety of *temporal blessings*, which sweeten our service, and as coming from his hand are very valuable. But they are by no means worth living for, considered in themselves, as they can neither satisfy our desires, preserve us from trouble, or support as under it. That light of God's countenance, which can pervade the walls and dissipate the gloom of a dungeon, is unspeakably preferable to all that can be enjoyed in a palace without it. The true end of life is, to live not to ourselves—but to Him who died for us; and while we devote ourselves to his service upon earth, to rejoice in the prospect of being happy with him forever in heaven.

These things are generally known and acknowledged by professors; but they are a favored few who *act consistently* with their avowed principles; who honestly, diligently, and without reserve, endeavor to make the most of their talents and strength in promoting the Lord's service, and allow themselves in no views or designs but what are plainly subordinate and subservient to it. Yes, I believe the best of the Lord's servants see cause enough to confess, that they are not only *unprofitable* in comparison of what they wish to be—but in many instances *unfaithful* likewise. They find so many snares, hindrances, and temptations, arising from without, and so much encumbrance from sin which dwells within—that they have more cause for humiliation than self-complacency, even when they seem most earnest and most useful.

However, we have no Scriptural evidence that we serve the Lord at all, any farther than we find a habitual desire and aim to serve him *wholly*. He is gracious to our imperfections and weakness; yet he requires *all the heart*, and will not be served by halves, nor accept what is performed by a divided heart.

Doing all to the glory of God, is the true alchemy which turns everything to gold, and ennobles the common actions of life into acts of piety; 1 Cor. 10:31. Nor is

there a grain of real goodness in the most specious actions, which are performed without a reference to God's glory. This the world cannot understand; but it will appear highly reasonable to those who take their ideas of God from the Scripture, and who have felt the necessity and found the benefits of redemption.

We are debtors many ways—the Lord has a right to us by *creation*, by *redemption*, by *conquest*, when he freed us from Satan's power, and took possession of our hearts by his grace; and, lastly, by our own voluntary *surrender*, in the day when he enabled us to fix our choice on himself—as our Lord and our portion. Then we felt the force of our obligations. We saw the beauty and honor of his service, and that nothing was worthy to stand in the least degree of competition with it. This is always equally true, though our perceptions of it are not always equally strong. But where it has been once really known, it cannot be wholly forgotten, or cease to be the governing principle of life; and the Lord has promised to revive the impression in those who wait upon him, and thereby to renew their strength; for in proportion as we feel by what ties we are his—we shall embrace his service as perfect freedom.

Again—when the *eye* is thus single, the whole body will be full of light. The principle of acting simply for God, will in general make the path of duty plain, solve a thousand otherwise dubious questions, lead to the most proper and obvious means, and preclude that painful anxiety about events, which upon no other plan can be avoided. The love of God is the best casuist; especially as it leads us to a careful attendance to his precepts, a reliance on his promises, and a submission to his will.

Most of our perplexities arise from an undue, though perhaps unperceived, attachment to SELF. Either we have some scheme of our own too closely connected with our general view of serving the Lord; or lay some stress upon our own management, which, though we suspect it may possibly fail us, we cannot entirely help trusting to. In these respects the Lord permits his servants occasionally to feel their own weakness; but if they are sincerely devoted to him, he will teach them to profit by it, and bring them by degrees to a simplicity of dependence, as well as of intention. Then all things are easy. Acting from love, and walking by faith, they can neither be *disappointed* or *discouraged*. Duty is their part, care is his, and they are enabled to cast it upon him. They know, that, when their *expedients* seem to fail—that he is still all-sufficient. They know, that, being engaged in his cause, they cannot miscarry; and that, though in some things they may seem to fall short of success, they are sure of meeting acceptance, and that he will estimate their services not by their actual effects—but according to the gracious *principle* and *desire* he has put into their hearts. 2 Chron. 6:7-8.

Communion with God

Dear Sir,

Though many authors have written largely and well concerning communion with God, I shall not refer you to books, or have recourse to them myself; but, in compliance with your request, shall simply offer you what occurs to my thoughts upon the subject. I propose not to exceed the limits of a sheet of paper, and must therefore come immediately to the point.

That God is to be worshiped, is generally acknowledged; but those who worship him in spirit and in truth, have real fellowship and communion with him, is known only to themselves. The world can neither understand nor believe it. Many, who would not be thought to have cast off all reverence for the Scripture, and therefore do not choose flatly to contradict the Apostle's testimony, 1Jo. 1:3, attempt to evade its force by restraining it to the primitive times. They will allow that it might be so then; but they pretend that circumstances with us are greatly altered. Circumstances are, indeed, altered with us, so far, that men may now pass for Christians who confess and manifest themselves strangers to the Spirit of Christ: but who can believe that the very nature and design of Christianity should alter in the course of time? and that communion with God, which was essential to it in the Apostles' days, should be now so unnecessary and is practicable as to expose all who profess an acquaintance with it to the charge of enthusiasm and folly? However, those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, will not be disputed out of their spiritual senses. If they are competent judges whether they ever saw the light, or felt the beams of the sun, they are no less certain that, by the knowledge of the Gospel, they are brought into a state of communion with God.

Communion with God presupposes union with God. By nature we are strangers, yes, enemies to God; but we are reconciled, brought near, and become his children, by faith in Christ Jesus. We can have no true knowledge of God, desire towards him, access unto him, or gracious communications from him, but in and through the Son of his love. He is the medium of this inestimable privilege: for he is the way, the only way, of fellowship between heaven and earth; the sinner's way to God, and God's way of mercy to the sinner. If any pretends to know God, and to have communion with him, otherwise than by the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whom he has sent, and by faith in his name, it is a proof that they neither know God nor themselves. God, if considered abstracted from the revelation of himself in the person of Jesus, is a consuming fire; and if he should look upon us without respect to his covenant of mercy established in the Mediator, we could expect nothing from him but indignation and wrath. But when his Holy Spirit enables us to receive the record which he has given of his Son, we are delivered and secured from condemnation; we are accepted in the Beloved; we are united to him in whom all the fullness of the Godhead substantially dwells, and all the riches of Divine wisdom, power, and love, are treasured up.

Thus in him, as the temple wherein the glory of God is manifested, and by him, as the representative and high priest of his people, and through him, as the living head of his mystical body the church, believers maintain communion with God. They have food to eat which the world knows not of, honor which comes of God alone, joy which a stranger intermeddles not with. They are, for the most part, poor and afflicted, frequently scorned and reproached, accounted hypocrites or visionaries, knaves or fools; but this one thing makes amends for all, "They have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

I would observe further, that as the incarnation of that Mighty One, on whom our help is laid, was necessary, that a perfect obedience to the law, and a complete and proper atonement for sin, might be accomplished in the human nature that had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; so, in another view, it affords us unspeakable advantage for our comfortable and intimate communion with God by him. The adorable and solemn perfections of Deity are softened, if I may so speak, and rendered more familiar and engaging to our apprehensions, when we consider them as resident in him, who is very bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and who, having by himself purged our sins, is now seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high, and reigns, in the nature of man, over all, God blessed forever.

Thus he who knows our frame, by becoming man like ourselves, is the supreme and ultimate object of that philanthropy, that human affection, which he originally implanted in us. He has made us susceptible of the endearments of friendship and relative life: and he admits us to communion with himself under the most engaging characters and relations, as our Friend, our Brother, and our Husband. Those who, by that faith which is of the operation of God, are thus united to him in Christ, are brought thereby into a state of real habitual communion with him. The degree of its exercise and sensible perception on our parts, is various in different people, and in the same person at different times; for it depends upon the communications we receive from the Lord the Spirit, who distributes them to each one, just as he determines, adjusting his dispensations with a wise and merciful respect to our present state of discipline.

If we were wholly freed from the effects of a depraved nature, the snares of an evil world, and the subtle temptations of Satan--our actual communion with God would be always lively, sensible, and fervent. It will be thus in heaven; there its exercise will be without obstruction, abatement, or interruption. But so long as we are liable to spiritual pride, indolence, an undue attachment to worldly things, and irregular distempered passions, the Lord is pleased to give, increase, suspend, or renew, the sensible impressions of his love and grace, in such seasons and measures as he sees most suitable to prevent or control these evils--or to humble us for them. We grieve his Spirit, and he withdraws; but, by his secret power over our hearts, he makes us sensible of our folly and loss, teaches us to mourn after him, and to entreat his return. These desires, which are the effects of his own grace, he answers in his own time, and shines forth upon the soul with healing in his beams.

But, such is our weakness, and so unapt are we to retain even those lessons which we have learned by painful experience, that we are prone to repeat our former miscarriages, and to render a repetition of the same changes necessary. From hence it is that what we call our frames are so very variable, and that our comfortable sense of Divine communion is rather transient than abiding. But the communion itself, upon which the life and safety of our souls depend, is never totally obstructed; nor can it be, unless God should be unmindful of his covenant, and forsake the work of his own hands. And when it is not perceptible to sense, it may ordinarily be made evident to faith, by duly comparing what we read in the Scripture with what passes in our hearts. I say ordinarily, because there may be some excepted cases. If a believer is unhappily brought under the power of some known sin, or has grievously and notoriously declined from his profession, it is possible that the Lord may hide himself behind so dark a cloud, and leave him for a while to such hardness of heart, as that he shall seem to himself to be utterly destitute and forsaken. And the like apprehensions may be formed under some of Satan's violent temptations, when he is permitted to come in as a flood, and to overpower the apparent exercise of every grace by a torrent of blasphemous and evil imaginations. Yet the Lord is still present with his people in the darkest hours, or the unavoidable event of such cases would be apostasy or despair. Psalm 41:11.

The communion we speak of comprises a mutual fellowship and communication in love, in counsels, and in interests.

In **LOVE**. The Lord, by his Spirit, manifests and confirms his love to his people. For this purpose he meets them at his throne of grace, and in his ordinances. There he makes himself known unto them, as he does not unto the world; causes his goodness to pass before them; opens, applies, and seals to them, his exceeding great and precious promises; and gives them the Spirit of adoption, whereby, unworthy as they are, they are enabled to cry "Abba, Father." He causes them to understand that great love with which he has loved them, in redeeming them by price and by power, washing them from their sins in the blood of the Lamb, recovering them from the dominion of Satan, and preparing for them an everlasting kingdom, where they shall see his face, and rejoice in his glory.

The knowledge of his love to them, produces a return of love from them to him. They adore him, and admire him; they make an unreserved surrender of their hearts to him. They view him and delight in him, as their God, their Savior, and their portion. They account his favor better than life. He is the sun of their souls: if he is pleased to shine upon them, all is well, and they are not greatly anxious about other things; but if he hides his face, the smiles of the whole creation can afford them no solid comfort. They esteem one day or hour spent in the delightful contemplation of his glorious excellencies, and in the expression of their desires towards him, better than a thousand. And when their love is most fervent, they are ashamed that it is so faint, and chide and bemoan themselves that they can love him no more. This often makes them long to depart, willing to leave their dearest earthly comforts, that they may see him as he is, without a veil or cloud: for they know that then, and not until then, they shall love him as they ought.

In **COUNSELS**. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him. He deals familiarly with them. He calls them not servants only, but friends; and he treats them as friends. He affords them more than promises; for he opens to them the plan of his great designs from everlasting to everlasting; shows them the strong foundations and inviolable securities of his favor towards them, the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of his love, which passes knowledge, and the unsearchable riches of his grace. He instructs them in the mysterious conduct of his providence, the reasons and ends of all his dispensations in which they are concerned; and solves a thousand hard questions to their satisfaction, which are inexplicable to the natural wisdom of man. He teaches them likewise the beauty of his precepts, the path of their duty, and the nature of their warfare. He acquaints them with the plots of their enemies, the snares and dangers they are exposed to, and the best methods of avoiding them. And he permits and enables them to acquaint him with all their cares, fears, needs, and troubles, with more freedom than they can unbosom themselves to their nearest earthly friends. His ear is always open to them; he is never weary of hearing their petitions, and answering their petitions.

The men of the world would account it a high honor and privilege to have an unrestrained liberty of access to an earthly king; but what words can express the privilege and honor of believers, who, whenever they please, have audience of the King of kings, whose compassion, mercy, and power are, like his majesty, infinite? The world wonders at their indifference to the vain pursuits and amusements by which others are engrossed; that they are so patient in trouble, so inflexible in their conduct, so well satisfied with that state of poverty and obscurity which the Lord, for the most part, allots them; but the wonder would cease, if what passes in secret were publicly known. They have obtained the Pearl of great price; they have communion with God; they derive their wisdom, strength, and comfort from on high; and cast all their cares upon him, who, they assuredly know, vouchsafes to take care of them. This reminds me of another branch of their communion, namely.

In **INTERESTS**. The Lord claims them for his portion; he accounts them his jewels; and their happiness in time and eternity is the great end which, next to his own glory, and in inseparable connection with it, he has immediately and invariably in view. In this point all his dispensations of grace and providence shall finally terminate. He himself is their guide and their guard: he keeps them as the apple of his eye; the hairs of their head are numbered; and not an event in their lives takes place but in an appointed subserviency to their final good. And as he is pleased to espouse their interests, they, through grace, are devoted to his interests. They are no longer their own; they would not be their own; it is their desire, their joy, their glory, to live to him who died for them. He has won their hearts by his love, and made them a willing people in the day of his power.

The glory of his name, the success of his cause, the prosperity of his people, the accomplishment of his will—these are the great and leading objects which are engraved upon their hearts, and to which all their prayers, desires, and endeavors are directed. They would count nothing dear, not even their lives, if set in competition with these. In the midst of their afflictions, if the Lord is glorified, if sinners are converted, if the church flourishes--they can rejoice. But when iniquity abounds, when love waxes cold, when professors depart from the doctrines of truth and the power of godliness--then they are grieved and pained to the heart; then they are touched in what they account their nearest interest, because it is their Lord's.

This is the spirit of a true Christian. May the Lord increase it in us, and in all who love his name! I have room only to subscribe myself.

Union with Christ

Dear Sir,

The union of a believer with Christ is so intimate, so unalterable, so rich in privilege, so powerful in influence, that it cannot be fully represented by any description or similitude taken from earthly things. The mind, like the sight, is incapable of apprehending a great object, without viewing it on different sides. To help our weakness, the nature of this union is illustrated, in the Scripture, by four comparisons, each throwing additional light on the subject, yet all falling short of the thing signified.

In our natural state, we are driven and tossed about, by the changing winds of opinion, and the waves of trouble, which hourly disturb and threaten us upon the uncertain sea of human life. But faith, uniting us to Christ, fixes us upon a sure foundation, the Rock of Ages, where we stand immovable, though storms and floods unite their force against us.

By nature we are separated from the divine life, as branches broken off, withered and fruitless. But grace, through faith, unites us to Christ the living Vine, from whom, as the root of all fullness, a constant supply of sap and influence is derived into each of his mystical branches, enabling them to bring forth fruit unto God, and to persevere and abound therein.

By nature we are hateful and abominable in the sight of a holy God, and full of enmity and hatred towards each other. By faith, uniting us to Christ, we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and joint communion among ourselves; even as the members of the same body have each of them union, communion, and sympathy, with the head, and with their fellow-members.

In our natural estate, we were cast out naked and destitute, without pity, and without help, Ezek. 16:1-63; but faith, uniting us to Christ, interests us in his righteousness, his riches, and his honors. Our Redeemer is our husband; our debts are paid, our settlements secured, and our names changed.

Thus the Lord Jesus, in declaring himself the foundation, root, head, and husband, of his people, takes in all the ideas we can frame of an intimate, vital, and inseparable union. Yet all these fall short of truth; and he has given us one further similitude, of which we can by no means form a just conception until we shall be brought to see him as he is in his kingdom. John 27:21: "That they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us."

Well may we say, What has God wrought! How inviolable is the security, how inestimable the privilege, how inexpressible the happiness, of a believer! How greatly is he indebted to grace! He was once afar off, but he is brought near to God by the blood of Christ: he was once a child of wrath, but is now an heir of everlasting life. How strong then are his obligations to walk worthy of God, who has called him to his kingdom and glory!

Christian experience.

Dear Sir,

I trust the difference of our sentiments, since we are agreed in the one thing needful, will no more interrupt our union and fellowship, than the difference of our features, or the tone of our voices. I wish you to believe that I would be no advocate for carelessness or formality. I hope my conscience bears me witness, that, besides trusting in the letter of the Scripture, I likewise desire an increase of that inward and comfortable sense of Divine things in which I believe you are happy; and that I wish not only to be a subject of the kingdom of Jesus, but likewise to have that kingdom powerfully set up in my heart—which consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, I see not how these can be distinguished, or what ground I could have to think myself a subject of his kingdom, unless I earnestly desired to have that kingdom in all its branches and blessings flourishing in my soul. I do not know that I live in the neglect of any means appointed of God for my growth in these blessings, or willingly allow myself in what is inconsistent with them; I think my heart is habitually in the pursuit of them, and that there is seldom an hour in any day when lively communion with my God, in Christ, is not present to my view as the chief good. To this purpose, through grace, I can venture to express myself to man, *though still it is true, when I come before the Lord, notwithstanding the diligence and circumspection I would aim at, I see myself a poor inconsistent creature, that my strength is total weakness, and all I have is sin.*

I confess I am afraid of fixing the criterion of a work of grace too high, lest the mourners in Zion should be discouraged; because I find it is the will of God that such should not be discouraged, but comforted; and because it appears to me, that the Scriptural marks have respect rather to **desires**, if real, than to **attainments**, or at least to those attainments which are often possessed by people who are kept very short of sensible comforts: Mat. 5:3-9; Luke 18:12, Luke 18:13; 1Pe. 2:7.

The points between you and I seem chiefly the following:

1. When may a person be properly denominated a believer?
2. What are the proper evidences and necessary concomitants of a lively thriving frame of spirit?
3. Whether such a degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent with the remnant of a depraved nature in our present state, will certainly and always preserve our souls from declensions and winter seasons?
4. Whether that gracious humility, which arises from a due sense of our own vileness, and of the riches of Divine grace, be ordinarily attainable without some mortifying experience of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of our own hearts?

A few lines upon each of these particulars, will, I think, take in the chief parts of your letter.

1. We differ something with respect to **what constitutes a believer**. I own nothing has surprised me more, in the course of our friendly debate, than your supposing that a person should date his conversion and his commencing a believer, from the time of his receiving the Gospel truths with that clearness and power as to produce in him an abiding *assurance*. The Apostle, in Eph. 1:13, makes a plain distinction

between believing and being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. By the experience and observation of many years, I have been more and more persuaded, that to represent assurance as being of the essence of faith, is not agreeable to the Scripture, which in many places either expressly asserts, or strongly intimates, the contrary: John 1:50, and John 20:29; Rom. 10:9; 1Jo. 5:1. Whoever is not a believer, must be an unbeliever; there can be no medium. Either there are many believers who have not assurance, or else there are many unbelievers who love the Lord Jesus, hate sin, are poor in spirit, and adorn the doctrine of the Gospel by their temper and conversation: and I doubt not but those who now have assurance, had, before they attained it, a something which wrought by love, and overcame the world. I know no principle capable of these effects but true faith, which, though at first it be like a grain of mustard-seed, is the seed of God through it be faint, it is genuine, as the dawning light is of the same nature with that which flows from the noonday sun. I allow that while faith is weak, there may be little solid comfort, if by that expression abiding comfort be meant. Faith gives safety and spiritual life: abiding peace and establishment follow the sealing of the Spirit. But though an infant has not the strength, activity, and understanding, which he will attain when he arrives to the age of manhood, he is as fully possessed of a principle of life, while he is an infant, as at any time afterwards.

2. We seem to differ likewise as to **the marks of a lively thriving spirit**; at least if any are supposed to be better or surer than those to which our Lord has promised blessedness, Mat. 5:3-9. He has said, "Blessed are those who mourn;" but he has not said, More blessed are those who are comforted. They are, to be sure, more happy at present; but their blessedness consists not in their present comforts, but in those perceptions of Gospel truths which form them to that contrite spirit in which God delights (Isa. 57:18), and which make them capable of Divine comforts, and spiritual hungering and thirstings after them. I would not represent myself as a stranger to peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. In the midst of all my conflicts, I have a heartfelt satisfaction from the Gospel, which nothing else could give. But I mean, though this be with me as an abiding principle, it rarely affords me what I think you intend when you speak of sensible comforts. I cannot feel that warmth of heart, that glowing of love, which the knowledge of such a Savior should inspire. I account it my sin, and I feel it my burden, that I cannot. And when I truly do this, when I can abhor myself for my stupidity, mourn over it, and humbly look up to the Lord for relief against it, I judge my soul to be at such times as much alive to God, as it would be if he saw fit to increase my comfort.

Let me always either rejoice in him, or mourn after him: I would leave the alternative to him, who knows best how to suit his dispensations to my state; and I trust he knows that I do not say this because I set a small value upon his presence. As to the experience of the Apostles, I believe they were patterns to all succeeding believers; but with some regard to the several trials and services to which we may be called in this world, He distributes severally to all his people according to his own will, yet with a wise and gracious accommodation to the circumstances and situations of each. The Apostle Paul connects the aboundings of his consolations with the aboundings of his afflictions, and with the state of the people to whom he preached; 2Co. 1:4-7. And if, instead of preaching the Gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum in the face of persecution, he had lived in a land of liberty, and been confined to a single church, for anything I know his cup might not have run over so often. Succeeding ministers of the Gospel, when called to very laborious and painful services, have, for the like reasons, been often favored with a double portion of that joy which makes hard things easy and bitter things sweet.

And, in general, those who walk humbly before Him, may expect trials; and in proportion, He will favor them with peculiar comforts. It is in this way he in a great measure fulfills his promise of making their strength equal to their day. And I am enabled to trust him in this matter, that if he should at any time see fit to call me to a

more difficult and dangerous sphere of service, or lead me into the furnace of affliction, he would, if he saw it needful, support and refresh me by such manifestations of his glory and love, as I know but little of at present. In a word, *a humble, dependent frame of spirit, perseverance in the use of appointed means, care to avoid all occasions of sin, an endeavor to glorify God in our callings, and an eye to Jesus as our all in all—these things are to me sure indications that the soul is right, that the Lord is present, and that grace is thriving and in exercise, whether sensible consolations abound or not.*

3. I propose the third question, concerning such a **degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent with the remnants of a depraved nature**, because I apprehend one effect of indwelling sin is, to render it morally impossible for us to be entirely faithful to that light and power which God has given us. It may sound like a contradiction to say, we cannot do what we desire: but there are many enigmas in a believer's experience, at least in mine; and I never expect to meet the man that knows his own heart, who will say he is always faithful, diligent, and obedient, to the full extent of his ability: I rather expect he would confess, with me, that he feels a need of more ability, and fresh supplies of grace, to enable him to make a better improvement of what he has already received. If some, as you suppose, in their dullest frames can read the Bible, go to the Throne of Grace, and mourn (as they ought) over what is amiss, I must say for myself, I can, and I cannot. Without doubt I can take the Bible in my hand, and force myself to read it; I can kneel down, and I can see I ought to mourn: but to understand and attend to what I read, to engage my heart in prayer, or to be duly humbled under the sense of so dark and dissipated a state of mind; these things, at some seasons, I can no more do than I can raise the dead; and yet I cannot plead positive inability: I am satisfied that what prevents me is my sin, but it is the sin of my nature, the sin that dwells in me. And I expect it will be thus with me at times, in a greater or less degree, until this body of sin shall be wholly destroyed.

Yet I believe the Lord is with me, even when he seems to be absent, otherwise my corruptions, at such seasons, might easily prevail to betray me into open or allowed sin, which, blessed be the grace and care of my good Shepherd, is not the case. I know not if I rightly understand the expression, "We may humbly hope, that those things we fall into, which are not in our power to prevent, will not be set to our account." The least of the evils I feel, and which seem most involuntary, if set to my account, would ruin me; and I trust, that even my worst deviations shall not appear against me, because I am a believer in Jesus: and I know, and am sure, that I do not wish to continue in sin that grace may abound. My conscience bears me witness, that I would not desire the rule of duty to be narrowed, or accommodated to my imperfections in a single instance. If the expression only means, that these unavoidable effects of our evil nature should not break our peace of conscience, or discourage us in our approaches to God, I am of the same mind; through mercy I have seldom any more doubt of my acceptance in the Beloved, when in a dark frame, than when I am most favored with liberty.

4. **Whether true evangelical humility, and an enlarged view of the grace of God in Christ triumphing over all obstacles, be ordinarily attainable without an experience of declensions, backslidings, and repeated forgiveness?** is the last question I shall consider. I dare say you will do me the justice to believe, that I would not advise anyone to run into sin in order to get a knowledge of his own heart: David broke his bones thereby; he obtained an affecting proof of his inability of standing in his own strength, and of the skill and goodness of his Physician who healed him: yet no man in his wits would break his bones for the sake of making experiments, if he were ever so sure they would be well set again. You think that a believer is never more humble in his own eyes, or admires Jesus more, than when he is filled with joy and peace: I readily allow, that the present impressions of Divine love are humbling; however, the direct tendency of gracious consolations in

themselves, is one thing; what evils they may afterwards occasion through the desperate depravity of our hearts, is another. We have a memorable case in point to explain my meaning. The Apostle Paul's recollection of his course while in a natural state, and the singular manner of his conversion, were evidently suited to make him a humble Christian, and he was so. By an especial favor of the Lord, he was afterwards taken up into the third heaven; what he saw or heard there he has not told us, but surely he met with nothing that could have a tendency to make him proud; doubtless he saw Jesus in his glory, and the humble spiritual worship of heaven; a sight which we might deem sufficient to make him walk in self-abasement all the days of his life: but Paul, though an eminent saint, was still liable to the effects of indwelling sin; he was in danger of being exalted through the abundance of revelations, and the Lord, his wise and gracious keeper, saw fit, in order to prevent it, that a messenger from Satan should be given him to buffet him.

Pride is so subtle, that it can gather strength even from those gracious manifestations which seem directly calculated to mortify it; so dangerous, that a messenger from Satan himself may be esteemed a mercy, if overruled and sanctified by the Lord to make or keep us more humble: therefore, though **we can never be too earnest in striving against sin, too watchful in abstaining from all appearance of evil**, and though those who wait upon the Lord may comfortably hope that he will preserve them from such things as would dishonor their profession in the sight of men; yet I apprehend those who appear most to adorn the Gospel in their outward conversation, are conscious of many things between the Lord and their own souls which covers them with shame, and that his tenderness and mercy to them, notwithstanding their perverseness, constrains them with admiration to adopt the language of Micah, "Who is a God like unto you, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?"

And I believe likewise, that, without such striking and repeated proofs of what is in their hearts, they would not so feelingly enter into the spirit of Job's confession, "Behold, I am vile!" nor would they have such a lively sense of their obligations to the merciful care and faithfulness of their great Shepherd, or of their entire and absolute dependence upon him, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. I find these considerations useful and necessary to reconcile me to my lot. The Lord knows what I need, and what I can bear: gladly would I receive, earnestly would I desire, more of his comforts while here; but if I mourn now, I hope to be comforted in heaven; in the mean time it is more immediately necessary for me, both as a Christian and as a minister, that I should be humbled; the Lord's will be done. I cannot pretend to determine what ministers, or what body of people, come nearest the character of the primitive time; but in my judgment they are the happiest Christians, who have the lowest thoughts of themselves, and in whose eyes Jesus is most glorious and precious.

Family worship.

Sir,

A neglect of family prayer is, I am afraid, too common among professors in this day. I am glad that you consider it both as a duty and a privilege, and are by grace determined, that, when you shall commence as the head of a family, you will worship God with all your house. It was Abraham's commendation, that he not only served the Lord himself, but was solicitous that his children and household might serve him likewise. I trust that he who inclines your heart to walk in the footsteps of faithful Abraham, will bless you in the attempt, and give you peace in your dwelling; a mercy which is seldom enjoyed, which indeed can hardly be expected, by those families which call not upon the Lord.

Though I readily comply with your request, and would be glad if I can offer anything that may assist or animate you in your good purpose, I am afraid I shall not answer your expectations with regard to the particulars of your inquiry, concerning **the most proper method of conducting family worship**. The circumstances of families are so various, that no determinate rules can be laid down: nor has the word of God prescribed any; because, being of universal obligation, it is wisely and graciously accommodated to suit the different situations of his people. You must, therefore, as to circumstantial, judge for yourself. *You will do well to pursue such a method as you shall find most convenient to yourself and family, without scrupulously binding yourself, when the Scripture has left you free.*

We have no positive precept enjoining us any set time for prayer, nor even how often we should pray, either in public or private; though the expressions of "continuing instant in prayer," "praying without ceasing," and the like, plainly intimate that prayer should be frequent. Daniel prayed three times a day; which the Psalmist speaks of as his practice likewise; and in one place declares his purpose of praising God seven times a day. This last expression is perhaps indefinite, not precisely seven times—but very often. Indeed, *a person who lives in the exercise of faith and love, and who finds by experience that it is good for him to draw near to God, will not need to be told how often he must pray*, any more than how often he must converse with an earthly friend. Those whom we love, we love to be much with. *Love is the best casuist, and either resolves or prevents a thousand scruples and questions, which may perplex those who only serve God from principles of constraint and fear.* A believer will account those his happiest days, when he has most leisure and most liberty of spirit for the exercise of prayer.

However, I think family should be performed at least daily, and, when unavoidable hindrances do not prevent, twice a day. Though all times and seasons are alike to the Lord, and his ear is always open whenever we have a heart to call upon him; yet to *us* there is a peculiar suitableness in beginning and closing the day with prayer: in the morning, to acknowledge his goodness in our preservation through the night, and entreat his presence and blessing on our families and callings in the course of the day; and at night, to praise him for the mercies of the day past, to humble ourselves before him for what has been amiss, to wait on him for a renewed manifestation of his pardoning love, and to commit ourselves and our concerns to his care and protection while we sleep.

You will, of course, choose those hours when you are least liable to be interrupted by the calls of business, and when the family can assemble with the most convenience: only I would observe, that it greatly preserves regularity and good order in a house, to keep constantly to the same hours when it is practical; and likewise, that it is best not to defer evening prayer until late, if it can be well avoided; lest some who join in the exercise, and perhaps the person himself who

leads in it, should be too weary or sleepy to give a due attention. On this account, I would advise to have family prayer before supper, where people have the choice and disposal of their own hours.

I think, with you, that it is very expedient and proper that reading a portion of the word of God should be ordinarily a part of our family worship; so likewise to sing a hymn or psalm, or part of one, at discretion; provided there are some people in the family who have enough of a musical ear and voice to conduct the singing in a tolerable manner: otherwise, perhaps, it may be better omitted. If you read and sing, as well as pray, *care should be taken that the combined services do not run into an inconvenient length.*

The chief thing to be attended to is, that it may be a **spiritual** service; and the great evil to be dreaded and guarded against in the exercise of every duty that returns frequently upon us, is **formality**. If a stated course of family prayer is kept up as constantly in its season as the striking of the clock, in time it may come to be almost as mechanically performed, unless we are continually looking to the Lord to keep our hearts alive.

It most frequently happens, that one or more members of a family are unconverted people. When there are such present, a great regard should be had to them, and everything conducted with a view to their edification, that they may not be disgusted or wearied, or tempted to think that it is little more than the fashion or custom of the house; which will probably be the case, unless the master of the family is *lively and earnest in performance of the duty, and likewise circumspect and consistent in every part of his behavior at other times.* By leading in the worship of God before children or strangers, a man gives bond (as it were) for his behavior, and adds strength to every other motive which should engage him to abstain from all appearance of evil. *It should be a constant check upon our language and tempers in the presence of our families, to consider that we began the day, and propose to end it, with them in prayer.* The Apostle Peter uses this argument to influence the conduct of husbands and wives towards each other; and it is equally applicable to all the members of a family; "That your prayers be not hindered," that is, either prevented and put off, or despoiled of all life and efficacy, by the ferment of sinful passions.

On the other hand, the proper exercise of family prayer, when recommended by a suitable deportment, is a happy means of instructing children in the great truths of religion, of softening their prejudices, and inspiring them with a temper of respect and affection, which will dispose them to cheerful obedience, and make them unwilling to grieve or offend.

In this instance, as in every other, we may observe, that the Lord's commands to his people are not arbitrary appointments; but that, so far as they are conscientiously complied with, they have an evident tendency and suitableness to promote our own advantage. He requires us to acknowledge him in our families, for our own sakes; not because he has need of our poor services, but because we have need of his blessing, and without the influence of his grace (which is promised to all who seek it) are sure to be unhappy in ourselves and in all our connections.

When **husband and wife** are happily partakers of the same faith, it seems expedient, and for their mutual good, that, besides their private devotions, and joining in family prayer, they should pray together. They have many needs, mercies, and concerns, in common with each other, and distinct from the rest of the family. The manner in which they should improve a little time in this joint exercise cannot well be prescribed by a third person: yet I will venture to suggest one thing; and especially, as I do not remember to have met with it in print. I conceive that it may prove much to their comfort to pray alternately, not only the husband with and for

the wife, but the wife with and for the husband. The Spirit of God, by the Apostle, has expressly restrained women from the exercise of spiritual gifts in public; but I apprehend the practice I am speaking of can no way interfere with that restriction. I suppose them in private together, and then I judge it to be equally right and proper for either of them to pray with the other. Nor do I meet anything in Paul's writings to prevent my thinking, that if he had been a married man, he would, though an Apostle, have been glad for the prayers of his wife. If you ask, how often they should pray together? I think the oftener the better, provided it does not break in upon their duties; once a day at least; and if there is a choice of hours, it might be as well at some distance from their other seasons of worship. But I would observe, as before, that *in matters not expressly commanded, prudence and experience must direct.*

I have written upon a supposition that you use extemporaneous prayer; but as there are many heads of families who fear the Lord, and have not yet attained liberty to pray extemporaneously before others, I would add, that their inability in this respect, whether real, or whether only proceeding from fear, and an undue regard to self, will not justify them in the omission of family prayer. Helps may be procured. Mr. Jenks's Devotions are in many hands; and I doubt not but there are other excellent books of the same kind, with which I am not acquainted. If they begin with a form, not with a design to confine themselves always to one, but make it a part of their secret pleading at the Throne of Grace, that they may be favored with the gift and spirit of prayer; and accustom themselves, while they use a form, to intersperse some petitions of their own; there is little doubt but they will in time find a growth in liberty and ability, and at length lay their book entirely aside. For it being every believer's duty to worship God in his family, his promise may be depended upon, to give them a sufficiency in all things, for those services which he requires of them.

Happy is that family where the worship of God is constantly and conscientiously maintained. Such houses are temples in which the Lord dwells, and castles garrisoned by a Divine power. I do not say, that, by honoring God in your house, you will wholly escape a share in the trials incident to the present uncertain state of things. **A measure of such trials will be necessary for the exercise and manifestation of your graces; to give you a more convincing proof of the truth and sweetness of the promises made to a time of affliction; to mortify the body of sin; and to wean you more effectually from the world.** But this I will confidently say, that the Lord will both honor and comfort those who thus honor him. Seasons will occur in which you shall know, and probably your neighbors shall be constrained to take notice, that he has not bid you seek him in vain. If you meet with troubles, they shall be accompanied by supports, and followed by deliverance; and you shall upon many occasions experience, that God is your protector, preserving you and yours from the evils by which you will see others suffering around you.

I have rather exceeded the limits I proposed; and therefore shall only add a request, that in your addresses at the Throne of Grace you will remember me.

Love to the brethren.

Dear Sir,

The Apostle having said, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hates you," immediately subjoins, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." By the manner of his expression, he sufficiently intimates, that the lack of this love is so universal, until the Lord plants it in the heart, that if we possess it, we may thereby be sure he has given us of his Spirit, and delivered us from condemnation. But as the heart is deceitful, and people may be awfully mistaken in the judgment they form of themselves, we have need to be very sure that we rightly understand what it is to love the brethren, before we draw the Apostle's conclusion from it, and admit it as an evidence in our own favor, that we have passed from death unto life. Let me invite you, reader, to attend with me a little to this subject.

There are some **COUNTERFEITS** of this love to the brethren, which it is to be feared have often been mistaken for it, and have led people to think themselves something, when indeed they were nothing. For instance:

1. There is a natural love of the brethren. People may sincerely love their relations, friends, and benefactors, who are of the brethren, and yet be utter strangers to the spiritual love the Apostle speaks of. So Orpah had a great affection for Naomi, though it was not strong enough to make her willing with Ruth to leave her native country, and her idol-gods. Natural affection can go no farther than to a personal attachment; and those who thus love the brethren, and upon no better ground, are often disgusted with those things in them, for which the real brethren chiefly love one another.

2. There is likewise a love of convenience. The Lord's people are gentle, peaceful, benevolent, swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. They are desirous of adorning the doctrine of God their Savior, and approving themselves followers of him who pleased not himself, but spent his life in doing good to others. Upon this account, those who are full of themselves, and love to have their own way, may like their company, because they find more compliances and less opposition from them, than from such as themselves. For a while Laban loved Jacob; he found him diligent and trustworthy, and perceived that the Lord had prospered him upon Jacob's account; but when he saw that Jacob flourished, and apprehended he was likely to do without him, his love was soon at an end; for it was only founded in self-interest.

3. A party-love is also common. The objects of this are those who are of the same sentiment, worship in the same way, or are attached to the same minister. Those who are united in such narrow and separate associations, may express warm affections, without giving any proof of true Christian love; for upon such grounds as these, not only professed Christians, but Jews and Turks, may be said to love one another: though it must be allowed, that, believers being renewed but in part, the love which they bear to the brethren is too often debased and alloyed by a mixture of selfish affections.

The principle of true love to the brethren, is the love of God—that love which produces obedience: 1Jo. 5:2; "By this we know that we love the children of God, if we love God, and keep his commandments." When people are free to form their connections and friendships, the ground of their communion is in a *sameness of inclination*. Christian love is spiritual. The children of God, who therefore stand in the relation of brethren to each other, though they have too many unhappy differences in points of smaller importance, agree in the supreme love they bear to their heavenly Father, and to Jesus their Savior; of course they agree in disliking and

avoiding sin, which is contrary to the will and command of the God whom they love and worship. Upon these accounts they love another, they are like-minded; and they live in a world where the bulk of mankind are against them, have no regard to their Beloved, and live in the sinful practices which his grace has taught them to hate. Their situation, therefore, increases their affection to each other. They are washed by the same blood, supplied by the same grace, opposed by the same enemies, and have the same heaven in view: therefore they love one another with a pure heart fervently.

The properties of this love, where its exercise is not greatly impeded by ignorance and bigotry, are such as prove its heavenly original. It extends to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, cannot be confined within the pale of a denomination, nor restrained to those with whom it is more immediately connected. It is gentle, and not easily provoked; hopes the best, makes allowances for infirmities, and is easily entreated. It is kind and compassionate; and this not in words only, but sympathizes with the afflicted, and relieves the indigent, according to its ability; and as it primarily respects the image of Christ in its objects, it feels a more peculiar attachment to those whom it judges to be the most spiritual, though without undervaluing or despising the weakest attainments in the true grace of the Gospel.

They are happy who thus love the brethren They have passed from death unto life; and may plead this gracious disposition, though not before the Lord as the ground of their hope, yet against Satan, when he would tempt them to question their right to the promises.

But, alas! as I before hinted, the exercise of this love, when it really is implanted, is greatly obstructed through the remaining depravity which cleaves to believers. We cannot be too watchful against those tempers which weaken the proper effects of brotherly love, and thereby have a tendency to darken the evidence of our having passed from death unto life.

We live in a day when the love of many (of whom we would hope the best) is at least grown very cold. The effects of a narrow, a suspicious, a censorious, and a selfish spirit, are but too evident among professors of the Gospel. If I were to insist at large upon the offenses of this kind which abound among us, I would seem almost reduced to the necessity, either of retracting what I have advanced, or of maintaining that a great part (if not the greatest part) of those who profess to know the Lord, are deceiving themselves with a form of godliness, destitute of the power: for though they may abound in knowledge and gifts, and have much to say upon the subject of Christian experience, they appear to lack the great, the inimitable, the indispensable criterion of true Christianity, a love to the brethren; without which, all other seeming advantages and attainments are of no avail. How is this disagreeable dilemma to be avoided?

I believe those who are most under the influence of Divine love, will join with me in lamenting their deficiency. It is well that we are not under the law, but under grace; for on whatever point we try ourselves by the standard of the sanctuary, we shall find reason to say, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord." **There is an amazing and humbling difference between the conviction we have of the beauty and excellence of Divine truths, and our actual experience of their power ruling in our hearts.** In our happiest hours, when we are most affected with the love of Jesus, we feel our love fervent towards his people. We wish it were always so; but **we are poor inconsistent creatures, and find we can do nothing as we ought, but only as we are enabled by his grace.** But we trust we do not allow ourselves in what is wrong; and, notwithstanding we may in particular instances be misled by ignorance and prejudice, we do in our hearts love the brethren, account them the excellent of the earth, and desire to have our lot and portion with them in time and in eternity. We know that the love we bear them is for his sake; and when

we consider his interest in them, and our obligations to him, we are ashamed and grieved that we love them no better.

If we could not conscientiously say thus much, we should have just reason to question our sincerity, and the safety of our state; for the Scriptures cannot be broken, nor can the grace of God fail of producing in some degree its proper fruits. Our Savior, before whom we must shortly appear as our judge, has made *love* the characteristic of his disciples; and without some evidence that this is the prevailing disposition of our hearts, we could find little comfort in calling him God. Let not this be accounted legality, as if our dependence was upon something in ourselves. The question is not concerning the method of acceptance with God, but concerning the **fruits** or **tokens** of an accepted state. The most eminent of these, by our Lord's express declaration, is brotherly love. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

No words can be plainer; and the consequence is equally plain, however hard it may bear upon any professors, that, though they could speak with the tongues of angels, had the knowledge of all mysteries, a power of working miracles, and a zeal prompting them to give their bodies to be burned in defense of the truth; yet if they love not the brethren, they are but as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals: they may make a great noise in the church and in the world; they may be wise and able men, as the words are now frequently understood; they may pray or preach with great fluency; but in the sight of God their faith is dead, and their religion is vain.

Candor.

(Definition: Openness of heart; frankness; ingenuousness of mind; a disposition to treat subjects with fairness; freedom from tricks or disguise; sincerity.)

Dear Sir,

I am, with you, an admirer of candor; but let us beware of counterfeits. True candor is a Christian grace, and will grow in none but a believing heart. It is an eminent and amiable property of that love which bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. It forms the most favorable judgment of people and characters, and puts the kindest construction upon the conduct of others that it possibly can, consistent with the love of truth. It makes due allowances for the infirmities of human nature, will not listen with pleasure to what is said to the disadvantage of any, nor repeat it without a justifiable cause. It will not be confined within the walls of a party, nor restrain the actings of benevolence to those whom it fully approves; but prompts the mind to an imitation of Him who is kind to the unthankful and the evil, and has taught us to consider every person we see as our neighbor.

Such is the candor which I wish to derive from the Gospel; and I am persuaded those who have imbibed most of this spirit, will acknowledge that they are still defective in it. There is an unhappy propensity, even in Christian men, to a selfish, narrow, censorious turn of mind; and the best are more under the power of prejudice than they are aware. A lack of candor among the professors of the same Gospel, is too visible in the present day. A truly candid person will acknowledge what is right and excellent in those from whom he may be obliged to differ: he will not charge the faults or extravagances of a few--upon a whole party or denomination: if he thinks it his duty to point out or refute the errors of any people, he will not impute to them such *consequences* of their tenets as they expressly disavow; he will not willfully misrepresent or aggravate their mistakes, or make them offenders for a word: he will keep in view the distinction between those things which are fundamental and essential to the Christian life, and those concerning which a difference of sentiment may and often has obtained among true believers. Were there more candor among those who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, the emotions of anger or scorn would not be so often felt or excited by pronouncing or hearing the words Churchman, or Dissenter, or Calvinist, or even Arminian.

Let us, my friend, be candid: let us remember how totally ignorant we ourselves once were; how often we have changed our sentiments in one particular or other, since we first engaged in the search of truth; how often we have been imposed upon by appearances; and to how many different people and occurrences we have been indebted, under God, for the knowledge which we have already attained. Let us likewise consider what treatment we like to meet with from others; and do unto them as we would they should do unto us. These considerations will make the exercise of candor habitual and easy.

But there is a candor, falsely so called, which springs from an indifference to the truth, and is governed by the fear of men and the love of praise. This pretended candor depreciates the most important doctrines of the Gospel, and treats them as points of speculation and opinion. It is a temporizing expedient to stand fair with the world, and to avoid that odium which is the unavoidable consequence of a steadfast, open, and hearty adherence to the truth as it is in Jesus. It aims to establish a fellowship between light and darkness, Christ and Belial; and, under a pretense of avoiding harsh and uncharitable judgments, it introduces a mutual connivance in principles and practices which are already expressly condemned by clear decisions

of Scripture. Let us not listen to the advocates for a candor of this sort; such a lukewarm temper, in those who would be thought friends of the Gospel, is treason against God, and treachery to the souls of men.

It is observable, that those who boast most of this candor, and pretend to the most enlarged and liberal way of thinking, are generally agreed to exclude from their comprehension all whom they call bigots; that is, in other words, those who, having been led by Divine grace to build their hopes upon the Foundation which God has laid in Zion, are free to declare their conviction, that other foundation can no man lay; and who, having seen that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, dare no longer conform to its leading maxims or customs, nor express a favorable judgment of the state or conduct of those who do. Those with this false candor, know not how to be candid to those who are truly godly; their singularity and importunity are offensive; and it is thought no way inconsistent with the specious boast of benevolence and moderation to oppose, hate, and revile them. A sufficient proof, that the candor which many plead for is only a softer name for that *intolerant spirit of the world* which opposes itself to the truth and obedience of the Gospel.

If a person be an avowed Socinian or Deist, I am still to treat him with candor; he has a right from me, so far as he comes in my way, to all the kind offices of humanity. I am not to hate, reproach, or affront him; or to detract from what may be valuable in his character, considered as a member of society. I may avail myself of his talents and abilities in points where I am not in danger of being misled by him. He may be a good lawyer, or historian, or physician; and I am not to lessen him in these respects, because I cannot commend him as a divine. I am bound to pity his errors, and to pray if perhaps God will give him repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth; and if I have a call to converse with him, I should speak with all gentleness and meekness, **remembering that grace alone has made me to differ**. But I am not to compliment him, to insinuate, or even to admit, that there can be any safety in his principles. Far be that candor from us, which represents the Scripture as a nose of wax, so that a person may reject or elude the testimonies there given to the Deity and atonement of Christ, and the all-powerful agency of the Holy Spirit, with impunity.

On the other hand, those who hold the Head, who have received the record which God has given of his Son; who have Scriptural views of sin and grace, and fix their hopes for time and eternity upon the Savior; in a word, all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity—these, I apprehend, if they are prevented from receiving, acknowledging, and loving each other--as he has received, owned, and loved them--are justly chargeable with a lack of candor. Shall I be cold to those whom Jesus loves? Shall I refuse them whom he has accepted? I find perhaps that they cannot rightly understand, and therefore cannot readily embrace, some points of doctrine in which the Lord has been pleased to enlighten me; that is, I (supposing my knowledge to be real and experimental) have received five talents, and they have as yet obtained but two; must I for this estrange myself from them? Rather let me be careful lest they be found more faithful and exemplary in the improvement of two talents, than I am in the management of five.

Again: why should some of those who know, or might know, that my hope, my way, my end, and my enemies, are the same with theirs, stand aloof from me, and treat me with coldness and suspicion, because I am called a Calvinist? I was not born a Calvinist, and possibly they may not die opposed to Calvinism. However that may be, if our hearts are fixed upon the same Jesus, we shall be perfectly of one mind before long; why should we not encourage and strengthen one another now? O that the arm of the Lord might be revealed, to revive that candor which the Apostle so strongly enforces both by precept and example! Then the strong would bear the infirmities of the weak, and believers would receive each other without doubtful disputation.

Once more: However sound and orthodox (as the phrase is) professors may be in their principles, though true candor will make tender allowances for the frailty of nature, and the power of temptation; yet neither candor nor charity will require us to accept them as real believers, unless the general strain and tenor of their deportment be as becomes the Gospel of Christ. It is to be lamented that too many judge rather by the *notions* which people express, than by the *fruits* which they produce; and as they judge of others, so they often judge of themselves. We cannot have opportunity to say all we could wish, and to all to whom we would wish to say it, upon this subject, in private life. Therefore it is the wisdom and duty of those who preach, and of those who print, to drop a word of caution in the way of their hearers and readers, that they may not mistake *notion* for spiritual life, nor a *form of godliness* for the power.

"When he arrived and saw **the evidence of the grace of God**, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." Acts 11:23 The grace of God is an operative principle; and where it really has place in the heart, the effects will be seen; effects so uniform and extensive, that the Apostle James makes one single branch of conduct, and that such a one as is not usually thought the most important, a sufficient test of our state before God; for he affirms universally, that "if any man seems to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, his religion is vain." And again he assures us, that "whoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." And to the same purpose Paul expresses himself on the subject of love (that love which he describes so accurately, that none can mistake it, unless they willingly deceive themselves): he declares, that, without this love, the brightest knowledge, the warmest zeal, and the most splendid gifts, are nothing worth.

It is to be feared these decisions will bear hard upon many who have a name to live among the churches of Christ. They are hearers and approvers of the Gospel, express a regard to those who preach it; they will stickle and fight for the doctrines, and know not how to bear those who fall a hair's breadth short of their standard; and yet there is so much levity or pride, censoriousness or worldliness, discoverable in their general behavior, that their characters appear very dubious; and though we are bound to wish them well, candor will not oblige or warrant us to judge favorably of such conduct; for the unerring word of God is the standard to which our judgments are to be referred and conformed.

In the sense, and under the limitations, which I have expressed, we ought to cultivate a candid spirit, and learn, from the experience of our own weakness, to be gentle and tender to others; avoiding at the same time that indifference and cowardice, which, under the name of candor, countenances error, extenuates sin, and derogates from the authority of Scripture.

Simplicity and godly sincerity.

"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in **simplicity and godly sincerity**, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world." 2 Corinthians 1:12

Dear Sir,

It would be a happy time if all professors of the Gospel could, with the Apostle, rejoice in the testimony of their consciences, that they lived in simplicity and godly sincerity. How many evils and scandals would be then prevented! But, alas! too many who name the name of Christ, seem to have hardly any idea of this essential part of the Christian character. A few thoughts upon a subject so little attended to, may not be unseasonable. The most advanced in the Christian life have something of this lesson yet to learn; and the greater proficiency we make in it, the greater will be our inward peace, and the more will our light shine before men, to the glory of our Heavenly Father.

Simplicity and sincerity, though inseparable, may be distinguished. The former is the principle from which the latter is derived. Simplicity primarily respects the frame of our spirit in the sight of God; sincerity more directly regards our conduct as it falls under the observation of men. It is true, the terms are frequently used interchangeably for each other, and may be so without occasioning any considerable mistake; but as they are not precisely the same, it may be proper, if we would speak accurately, to keep this distinction in view.

Some people, who have been more enamored with the name of **simplicity** than acquainted with its nature, have substituted in its stead a childishness of language and manners; as if they understood the word *simple* only in the mere vulgar sense, as equivalent to foolish. But this infantile softness gives just disgust to those who have a true taste and judgment of Divine things. An artificial or pretended simplicity is a contradiction in terms, and differs as much from the simplicity of the Gospel as paint does from beauty.

The true simplicity, which is the honor and strength of a believer, is the effect of a spiritual perception of the truths of the Gospel. It arises from, and bears a proportion to, the sense we have of our own unworthiness, the power and grace of Christ, and the greatness of our obligations to him. So far as our knowledge of these things is vital and experimental, it will make us simple-hearted. This simplicity may be considered in two respects, —a simplicity of intention, and a simplicity of dependence. The former stands in opposition to the corrupt workings of self, the latter to the false reasoning of unbelief.

Simplicity of intention, implies that we have but one leading aim, to which it is our deliberate and unreserved desire that everything else in which we are concerned may be subordinate and subservient—in a word, that we are devoted to the Lord, and have by grace been enabled to choose him, and to yield ourselves to him, so as to place our happiness in his favor, and to make his glory and will, the ultimate scope of all our actions. He well deserves this from us. He is the all-sufficient good. He alone is able to satisfy the vast capacity he has given us; for he formed us for himself: and those who have tasted he is gracious, know that "his loving-kindness is better than life;" and that his presence and fullness can supply the lack, or make up the loss, of all creature-comforts.

So likewise he has a just claim to us that we should be wholly his: for, besides that, as his creatures, we are in his hand as clay in the hands of the potter, he has a

redemption-title to us: He loved us, and bought us with his own blood. He did not hesitate or halt between two opinions, when he engaged to redeem our souls from the curse of the law and the power of Satan. He could, in the hour of his distress, have summoned legions of angels (had that been needful) to his assistance, or have destroyed his enemies with a word or a look; he could easily have saved himself; but how then could his people have been saved, or the promises of the Scripture have been fulfilled? Therefore he willingly endured the cross, he gave his back to the smiters, He poured out his blood, he laid down his life. Here was an adorable simplicity of intention in him!

"And shall we not, O Lover of souls! be simply, heartily, and wholly yours? Shall we refuse the cup of affliction from your hand, or for your sake? Or shall we desire to drink of the cup of sinful pleasure, when we remember what our sins have cost you? Shall we wish to be loved by the world which hated you, or to be admired by the world which despised you? Shall we be ashamed of professing our attachment to such a Savior? No, Lord, forbid it. Let your love constrain us; let your name be glorified, and your will be done, by us and in us. Let us count all things dross and dirt for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us not desire anything which you see fit to withhold, nor repine to part with what you call for; nor even take pleasure in what you bestow, unless we can improve it for you; and ever prefer your love above our chief temporal joy!"

Such is the language of the heart that is blessed with Gospel simplicity. It was once the strong-hold of sin, the throne of self; but now self is cast down, and Jesus rules by the golden scepter of love. This principle preserves the soul from low, sordid, and idolatrous pursuits; will admit of no rival near the Beloved, nor will it yield either to the bribes or threats of the world.

There is likewise a **simplicity of dependence**. Unbelief is continually raising objections, magnifying and multiplying difficulties. But faith in the power and promises of God inspires a noble simplicity, and casts every care upon him, who is able and has engaged to support and provide.

Thus, when **Abraham**, at the Lord's call, forsook his country and his father's house, the Apostle observes, "he went out, not knowing where he went." It was enough that he knew whom he followed: the all-sufficient God was his guide, his shield, and his exceeding great reward. So, when exercised with long waiting for the accomplishment of a promise, he staggered not—he did not dispute or question—but simply depended upon God, who had spoken, and was able also to perform. So likewise, when he received that hard command to offer up his son, of whom it was said, "in Isaac shall your seed be called," he simply obeyed, and depended upon the Lord to make good his own word: Heb. 11:18-19.

In this spirit David went forth to meet Goliath, and overcame him. And thus the three worthies were unawed by the threats of Nebuchadnezzar, and rather chose to be cast into a burning furnace than to sin against the Lord. And thus Elijah, in a time of famine, was preserved from concern and need, and supported by extraordinary methods; 1Ki. 17:1-14 In these times we do not expect miracles, in the strict sense of the word; but those who simply depend upon the Lord, will meet with such tokens of his interposition in a time of need, as will, to themselves at least, be a satisfying proof that he cares for them. How comfortable is it to us, as well as ornamental to our profession, to be able to trust the Lord in the path of duty! to believe that he will supply our needs, direct our steps, plead our cause, and control our enemies! Thus he has promised, and it belongs to Gospel simplicity to take his word against all discouragements. This will animate us in the use of all lawful means, because the Lord has commanded us to wait upon him in them: but it will likewise inspire confidence and hope when all means seem to fail, Hab. 3:17, Hab. 3:18.

For lack of this dependence many dishonor their profession, and even make shipwreck of the faith. Their hearts are not simple; they do not trust in the Lord, but lean unto their own understandings, and their hopes or fears are influenced by worms like themselves. This causes a duplicity of conduct. They fear the Lord—and serve other gods. By their language, at some times, one would suppose they desire to serve the Lord only; but, as if they feared that he was not able to protect or provide for them, they make a league with the world, and seek either security or advantage from sinful compliances. These cannot rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience. They must live miserably. They are attempting to reconcile, what our Lord has declared to be utterly incompatible, the service of God and Mammon. They have so much sense of religion as embitters their worldly pursuits; and so much regard to the world as prevents their receiving any real comfort from religion. These are the lukewarm professors, neither hot nor cold; neither approved of men, nor accepted of God. They can attend upon ordinances, and speak like Christians; but their tempers are unsanctified, and their conduct irregular and blamable. They are not simple; and therefore they cannot be sincere.

I need not take time to prove, that the effect of simplicity will be sincerity. For those who love the Lord above all, who prefer the light of his countenance to thousands of gold and silver, who are enabled to trust him with all their concerns, and would rather be at his disposal than at their own, will have but little temptation to insincerity. The principles and motives upon which their conduct is formed, are the same in public as in private. Their behavior will be all of one piece, because they have but one design. They will speak the truth in love, observe a strict punctuality in their dealings, and do unto others as they would others should do unto them; because these things are essential to their great aim of glorifying and enjoying their Lord. A fear of dishonoring his name, and of grieving his Spirit, will teach them not only to avoid gross and known sins, but to abstain from all appearance of evil. Their conduct will therefore be consistent; and they will be enabled to appeal to all who know them, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have conducted themselves in the world."

To a sincere Christian, that deceit and cunning which passes for wisdom in the world, appears to be not only unlawful but unnecessary. He has no need of the little reserves, evasions, and disguises, by which designing men endeavor (though often in vain) to conceal their proper characters, and to escape deserved contempt. **He is what he seems to be, and therefore is not afraid of being found out.** He walks by the light of the wisdom that is from above, and leans upon the arm of Almighty Power; therefore he walks at liberty—trusting in the Lord, whom he serves with his spirit in the Gospel of his Son.

Our divine Shepherd.

November 5, 1774

Dear sir,

I have not very lately had recourse to the expedient of descanting upon a text, but I believe it the best method I can take, to give my thoughts upon a few obvious topics, which I suppose uniformly present themselves to my mind when I am about to write to you. Just now, that sweet expression of David occurred to my thoughts, "*The Lord is my Shepherd.*" Permit me, without plan or premeditation, to make a few observations upon it; and may you feel the peace, the confidence, the blessedness, which a *believing application* of the words is suited to inspire.

David had a **divine Shepherd**, whose wisdom and power were infinite; and might therefore warrantably conclude he should not lack, and need not fear. And we also may conclude the same, if our Shepherd is the Lord. Besides, the very nature of the Shepherd's office respecting the state of such frail creatures as we are, requires those attributes, for the due discharge of it, which are incommunicably Divine. He must intimately know every individual of the flock. His eye must be upon every one, and his ear open to their prayers, and his hand stretched out for their relief, in all places and in all ages. Every thought of every heart must be open to his view; and his wisdom must penetrate, and his arm control and over-rule, all the hidden and complicated machinations of the powers of darkness. He must have the administration of universal providence, over all the nations, families, and peoples upon earth, or he could not effectually manage for those who put their trust in him, in that immense variety of cases and circumstances in which they are found.

Reason, as well as Scripture, may convince us, that he who gathers the outcasts of Israel, who heals the broken in heart, who upholds all that fall, raises up all that are bowed down, and upon whom the eyes of all wait for their support—can be no other than He who counts the number of the stars, and calls them all by their names, who is great in power, and whose understanding is infinite! To this purpose likewise, the prophet Isaiah describes this mighty Shepherd, Isaiah 40:9-17, both as to his person and office.

But is not this indeed, the great mystery of godliness? How just is the Apostle's observation, that no man can say, *Jesus Christ is the Lord*—but by the Holy Spirit! How astonishing the thought—that the Maker of heaven and earth, the Holy One of Israel, before whose presence the earth shook, the heavens dropped, when he displayed a faint emblem of his majesty upon Sinai, should afterwards appear in the form of a servant, and hang upon a cross, the sport and scorn of wicked men!

I cannot wonder, that to the wise men of the world this appears absurd, unreasonable, and impossible; yet to right reason, to reason enlightened and sanctified, however amazing the proposition be—yet it appears true and necessary, upon a supposition that a holy God is pleased to pardon sinners in a way suited to display the solemn glories of his justice. The same arguments which prove that the blood of bulls and goats is insufficient to take away sin, will conclude against the utmost doings or sufferings of men or angels. The Redeemer of sinners must be mighty; he must have a personal dignity, to stamp such a value upon his undertakings, as that thereby God may appear *just*, as well as *merciful*, in justifying the ungodly for his sake; and he must be all-sufficient to bless, and almighty to protect—those who come unto him for safety and life.

Such a one is our Shepherd. This is He of whom we, through grace, are enabled to say—*we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture*. We are his by every tie and right: he made us, he redeemed us, he reclaimed us from the hand of our enemies;

and we are his by our own voluntary surrender of ourselves; for though we once slighted, despised, and opposed him—he made us willing in the day of his power! He knocked at the door of our hearts; but we (at least I) barred and fastened it against him as much and as long as possible—but when he revealed his love, we could stand out no longer. Like sheep, we are weak, destitute, defenseless, prone to wander, unable to return, and always surrounded with wolves; but all is made up in the fullness, ability, wisdom, compassion, care, and faithfulness of our great Shepherd. He guides, protects, feeds, heals, and restores, and will be our guide and our God—even until death. Then he will meet us, receive us, and present us unto himself—and we shall be *near* him, and *like* him, and *with* him forever.

Ah! my friend, what a subject is this! I trust it is the joy of your heart. Placed as you are by his hand in a superior rank, you see and feel that the highest honors, and the most important concerns that terminate with the present life—are as trivial as the sports of children, in comparison with the views and the privileges you derive from the glorious Gospel. And your situation in life renders the grace bestowed upon you—the more conspicuous and distinguishing. I have somewhere met with a similar reflection of Henry the Fourth of France, to this purpose, that, though many came into the world the same day with him, he was probably the only one among them, who was born to be a king. Your Lordship is acquainted with many, who, if not born on the same day with you, were born to titles, estates, and honors; but how few of them were born to the honor of making a public and consistent profession of the glorious Gospel! The hour is coming, when all honors and possessions—but this which comes from God alone, will be eclipsed and vanish, and, "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind." How miserable will they then be, who must leave their all!

But grace and faith can make the lowest state of life supportable, and make a dismissal from the highest state of life desirable. Of the former I have many living proofs and witnesses around me. Your Lordship, I trust, will have sweet experience of the latter, when, after having fulfilled the will of God in your generation, you shall be called (I hope in some yet distant day) to enter into your Master's joy. In the mean time, how valuable are life, talents, influence, and opportunities of every kind—if we are enabled to improve and lay out all for him who has thus loved us, thus provided for us!

As to myself, I would hope there are few, who have so clear a sense of their obligations to him, who make such unsuitable and languid returns as I do. I think I have a desire to serve him better; but, alas! evil is present with me. Surely I shall feel something like shame and regret for my coldness, even in heaven; for I find I am never happier—than when I am most ashamed of myself upon this account here.