

**SAVING
KNOWLEDGE**

LETTERS

BY

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Letters by John Newton

Saving Knowledge.

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Saving knowledge

August 11, 1775

My dear Friend,

I thank you for your letter. Your objections neither displease nor weary me. While *truth* is the object of your inquiry, the more freedom you use with me the better. Nor do they surprise me; for I have formerly made similar objections myself. I have stood upon your ground—and I continue to hope you will one day stand upon mine! As I have told you more than once, I do not mean to dictate to you, or to wish you to receive anything upon my recommendation; but, in the simplicity of friendship, I will give you my thoughts from time to time upon the points you propose, and leave the outcome to the Divine blessing.

The term *Arminian*, as at present applied, is very indiscriminate, and takes in a great variety of people and sentiments, among whom, I believe, there are many who hold the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and live a life of faith in the Son of God. I am far from supposing that God will guide every sincere person exactly to adopt all my sentiments. But there are some sentiments which I believe essential to the very state and character of a true Christian. And these make him a Christian; not merely by being his acknowledged sentiments—but by a certain peculiar manner in which he possesses them.

There is a certain important change which takes place in the heart, by the operation of the Spirit of God, before the soundest and most orthodox sentiments can have their proper influence upon us. This work, or change, the Scripture describes by various names, each of which is designed to teach us the marvelous effects it produces, and the Almighty power by which it is produced. It is sometimes called a new birth, John 3:3; sometimes a new creature, or new creation, as 2 Co. 5:17; sometimes the causing light to shine out of darkness, 2 Co. 4:6; sometimes the opening the eyes of the blind, Acts 26:18; sometimes the raising the dead to life, Eph. 2:5. Until a person has experienced this change, he will be at a loss to form a right conception of it. This is not being convinced of a mere opinion—but receiving a principle of Divine life and light in the soul. And until this is received, the things of God, the truths of the Gospel, cannot be rightly discerned or understood by the utmost powers of fallen man, who, with all his wisdom, reason, and talents, is still but what the Apostle calls *the natural man*, until the power of God visits his heart! 1Co. 2:14.

This work is sometimes wrought *suddenly*, as in the case of Lydia, Act. 16:14; at other times very *gradually*. A person who before was a stranger even to the form of godliness, or at best content with a mere religious form, finds new thoughts arising in his mind, feels some concern about his sins, some desire to please God, some suspicions that all is not right. He examines his views of religion, hopes the best of them, and yet cannot rest satisfied in them. Today, perhaps, he thinks himself fixed; tomorrow he will be all uncertainty. He inquires of others; weighs, measures, considers; meets with sentiments which he had not attended to; thinks them plausible; but is presently shocked with objections, or supposed consequences, which he finds himself unable to remove.

As he goes on in his inquiry, his difficulties increase. New doubts arise in his mind; even the Scriptures perplex him, and appear to assert contrary things. He would sound the depths of truth by the plummet of his *reason*—but he finds his line is too short! Yet even now the man is under a guidance, which will at length lead him right. The importance of the subject takes up his thoughts, and takes off the relish he once had for the things of the world. He reads, he prays, he strives, he resolves.

Sometimes inward perplexities and outward temptations bring him to his wit's end. He almost wishes to stand where he is, and inquire no more—but he cannot stop.

At length he begins to *feel* the inward depravity, which he had before owned as a mere opinion. A sense of sin and guilt cut him out new work. Here reasoning will stand him in no stead. This is a painful change of mind; but it prepares the way for a blessing. It silences some objections better than a thousand arguments; it cuts the web of his own wisdom and attainments; it makes him weary of working for life; and teaches him, in God's due time, the meaning of that text, "To him who *works* not—but believes in him who justifies the ungodly—his faith is counted for righteousness."

Then he learns, that *Scriptural faith* is a very different thing from a *rational assent* to the Gospel; that it is the immediate gift of God, Eph. 2:8; the operation of God, Col. 2:12; that Christ is not only the *object*—but the *author* and *finisher* of faith, Heb. 12:2; and that faith is not so properly a part of that *obedience* we owe to God, as an inestimable *benefit* we receive from him for Christ's sake, Phi. 1:29; which is the medium of our justification, Rom. 5:1, and the principle by which we are united to Christ (as the branch to the vine), John 17:21. I have described a path in which I have known many led, and in which I have walked myself.

The Gospel, my dear sir, is a salvation appointed for those who are ready to perish—and is not designed to put them in a way to save themselves by their own works. It speaks to us as condemned already, and calls upon us to believe in a crucified Savior—that we may receive redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. And the Spirit of God, by the Gospel, first convinces us of unbelief, sin, and misery; and then, by revealing the things of Jesus to our minds, enables us, as helpless sinners, to come to Christ, to receive him, to behold him; or, in other words, to believe in him, and expect pardon, life, and grace from him; renouncing every hope and aim in which we once rested, "and accounting all things loss and rubbish for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ." John 6:35; Isa. 45:22; with John 6:40; Col. 2:6.

In some of my *Omicron's Letters*, you will find my thoughts more at large upon these subjects than I have now time to write them. You will see in it the sentiments of a man of great learning, sound reasoning, an amiable and irreproachable character, and how little he accounted of all these advantages when the Lord was pleased to enlighten his mind.

Though we have not exactly the same view of human depravity—yet as we both agree to take our measure of it from the Word of God, I trust we shall not always differ about it. Adam was created in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, Eph. 4:24. This *moral* image, I believe, was totally lost by sin. In that sense, he died the day, the moment, he ate the forbidden fruit. God was no longer his joy and delight; he was averse from the thoughts of his presence, and would (if possible) have hid himself from him. His *natural* powers, though doubtless impaired, were not destroyed. Man by nature, is still capable of great things. His understanding, reason, memory, imagination, etc. sufficiently proclaim that the Hand that made him is Divine. He is, as Milton says of Beelzebub, *majestic though in ruins*. He can reason, invent, and by study, attain a considerable knowledge in natural things. The exertions of human genius, as specified in the characters of some philosophers, poets, orators, etc. are astonishing. But man cannot know, love, trust, or serve his Maker—unless he is renewed in the spirit of his mind.

God has preserved in him likewise, some feelings of benevolence, pity, some sense of natural justice and truth, etc. without which there could be no society. But these, I apprehend, are little more than instincts, by which the world is kept in some small degree of order. But, being under the direction of pride and self, do not deserve the

name of virtue and goodness, because the exercise of them does not spring from a principle of love to God, nor is directed to his glory, or regulated by the rule of his Word—until a *principle of grace* is superadded.

You think that I will not say, "that God, judicially in punishment of one man's sin, added these corruptions to all his posterity." Let us suppose, that the punishment annexed to eating the forbidden fruit, had been the loss of Adam's rational powers, and that he should be degraded to the state and capacity of a brute. In this condition, had he begotten children after the Fall in his own likeness, his nature being previously changed, they must have been, of course, brutes like himself; for he could not convey to them those original powers which he had lost. Will this illustrate my meaning?

Sin did not deprive him of rationality—but spirituality. His nature became earthly, sensual, yes devilish; and this fallen nature, this carnal mind, which is enmity against God—is not subject to his law, neither indeed can it be, Rom. 8:7—we universally derive from him. Look upon children—they presently show themselves averse from good—but are exceedingly propense to evil. This they can learn even without a master; but ten thousand instructors and instructions cannot instill good into them, so as to teach them to love their Creator—unless a Divine power acts in their hearts. This is just as it is with the earth, which produces weeds spontaneously. But if you see a fruit filled garden—you are sure that it was planted or sown there, and did not spring from the soil by itself.

I know many hard questions may be started upon this subject; but the Lord in due time will clear his own cause, and vindicate his own ways. I leave all difficulties with him. It is sufficient for me that Scripture asserts, and experience proves, that it is thus in fact; Rom. 3:9-21; Job. 14:4.

Thus, we have not only forfeited our happiness by transgression—but are by our depravity, incapable of it—and have no more desire or taste for such a state as the Scripture describes heaven to be, than a man born deaf can have for a concert of music. And therefore our Lord declares, that, unless a man is born again—he not only *shall* not—but *cannot* see the kingdom of God! Hence a twofold necessity of a Savior: his blood for the pardon of our sins; his life, Spirit, and grace, to quicken our souls, and form us anew for himself, that we may feel his love, and show forth his praise.

Paul, before his conversion, was not sincere, in the sense I hope you to be. He thought himself in the right, without doubt, as many have done when they killed God's servants, John 16:2. He was blindly and obstinately zealous. He did not enter into the merits of the Christian cause, or inquire into facts with that attention which sincerity would have put him upon. You think that his sincerity and zeal were the very things that made him a chosen instrument: he himself speaks of them as the very things that made him peculiarly unworthy of that honor, 1Co. 15:9; and he tells us, that he was set forth as a pattern of the Lord's long-suffering and mercy—that the very chief of sinners might be encouraged, 1Ti. 1:15-16. Had he been sincerely desirous to know whether Jesus was the Messiah, there was enough in his character, doctrines, miracles, and the prophecies concerning him—to have cleared up the point. But he took it for granted he was right in his opinion, and hurried blindly on, and was (as he said himself) exceedingly mad against them.

Such a *kind of sincerity* is common enough. People believe themselves right, and therefore treat others with scorn or rage. They appeal to the Scriptures—but first lay down *their own preconceived sentiments* for truths, and then examine what Scriptures they can find to countenance them. Surely a person's thinking himself right, will not give a sanction to all that he does under that persuasion.

Ignorance and *obstinacy* are in themselves sinful, and no *plea of sincerity* will exempt from the danger of being under their influence: Isa. 27:11; Luke 6:39.

It appears to me, that, though you will not follow any man implicitly, you are desirous of discovering your mistakes, supposing you are mistaken in any point of importance. You read and examine the Word of God, not to find weapons with which to defend your sentiments at all events—but to know whether they are defensible or not. You pray for God's light and teaching; and in this search you are willing to risk, what men are commonly much afraid of hazarding— character, interest, preferment, favor, etc. A sincerity of this kind I too seldom meet with; when I do, I account it a token for good, and am ready to say, "No man can do this—unless God is with him." However, *sincerity* is not *conversion*; but I believe it is always a forerunner of it.

I would not be uncharitable and censorious, hasty and peremptory, in judging my fellow-creatures. But if I acknowledge the Word of God—I cannot avoid forming my judgment upon it. It is true, I cannot look into people's hearts; but hearts and principles are delineated to my hand—in the Scripture. I read, that no *murderer* has eternal life in him; I read likewise, "If any man *loves* not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed;" and therefore I conclude, that there are *speculative* errors as heinous in their guilt, as destructive in their effects, as *murder*—and that the most moral, upright man—if he loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, is in the sight of God, the Judge of all—as displeasing to Him as a murderer!

It has pleased God, for the peace and support of society, to put a *black mark* upon those sins which affect the peace and welfare of our neighbor, such as adultery and murder. But undoubtedly the sins committed immediately against *himself* must be more heinous than any which offend our fellow-creatures. The second commandment, Mat. 22:39, is like the first; but it depends upon it, and is therefore inferior to it. Men ordinarily judge otherwise. To live regardless of God and the Gospel, is looked upon as a *minor fault*—in comparison with offenses against society. But sooner or later it will appear otherwise to all.

A group of robbers may pride themselves upon the justice, honor, and truth they observe towards one another; but because they are a nuisance to the public good, they are deservedly accounted villains, and treated as such, notwithstanding their *petty morality* among themselves. Now, such a company of robbers bears a much greater proportion to a whole nation, than a nation, or all the nations of the earth, bears to the great God. Our dependence upon him is absolute, our obligations to him infinite. In vain shall men plead their moral discharge of relative duties to each other—if they fail in the unspeakably greater relation under which they stand to God. Therefore, when I see people living without God in the world, as all do until they are converted, I cannot but judge them in a dangerous state; not because I take pleasure in censuring, or think myself authorized to pass sentence upon my fellow-creatures—but because the Scripture decides expressly on the case, and I am bound to take my sentiments from thence.

The Philippian jailer was certainly a Christian when baptized, as you observe. He trembled; he cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul did not bid him *amend his life*—but to *believe* in the Lord Jesus. He believed, and rejoiced. But the Lord blessed the Apostle's words, to produce in him that saving faith, which filled him with joy and peace. It was, as I observed before, something more than an *assent to the proposition*, that Jesus is the Christ. It was a resting in him for forgiveness and acceptance, and a cleaving to him in love. No other faith will purify the heart, work by love, and overcome the world.

I feel myself much interested in your concerns; and your unexpected frank application to me, I consider as a providential call, which binds me to your service.

I hope our correspondence will be productive of happy effects, and that we shall both one day rejoice in it.

The Christian's creed

April 3, 1759.

Dear Sir,

I know not if my heart was ever more united to any person, in so short a space of time, than to you; and what engaged me so much, was the spirit of meekness and of love (that special and inimitable mark of true Christianity) which I observed in you. I mean it not to *your* praise. May all the praise be to *Him*, from whom every good and perfect gift comes--who alone makes the best to differ from the vilest of men. But I think I may well mention, to your encouragement, that all who conversed with you greatly regret your speedy departure; and I am persuaded, the same temper, the same candor, will make you acceptable, honorable, and useful, wherever you go. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers; they shall obtain the mercy they need, and possess the peace they love. They shall inherit the earth. The earth, sinful and miserable as it is, shall be worthy to be called an inheritance to them, for they shall enjoy a comparative heaven in it. They shall be called the children of God, though dignified with no title among men. Alas! how much are these things overlooked, even by many who, I would hope, are real believers.

Methinks a very different spirit from that of the church of Laodicea is to be seen among us; though perhaps it is not easy to say which is the best of the two. Laodicea was neither cold nor hot; we are both cold and hot at once, and both to the extreme. Hot, hasty, and arbitrary, in those few things where mediocrity is a virtue; but cool and remiss in those great points, where the application of the whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, is so absolutely necessary, and so positively enjoined. Surely there is too much room for this observation, and I perhaps stand self-condemned in making it.

I hope you will take opportunity to improve your interest in Mr. **** by letter. He expressed much satisfaction in the hour he spent with you before you sailed, and a great regard for you; therefore would, I doubt not, give you a fair hearing. He makes such large concessions sometimes, that I am apt to think he is conscious of the weakness of his own argument; and then he is as soon angry with himself for complying so far, and flies off to the other extreme. Yet for the most part, when he speaks plain, and is not restrained by complaisance for particular people, he appears not only a stranger to experimental religion--but averse to the notion, and generally inclined to treat it with levity. His obstacles are very many and very great; his reputation as a learned man, his years, his regular life, and perhaps, above all, his performances in print, especially his last book--are so many barriers that must be brake through before conviction can reach him. But the grace of God can do all this, and more; and indeed, when I think of the many truly valuable parts of his character, and the indefatigable pains he has taken in his researches after truth, I am willing to hope that the Lord will at length teach him the true wisdom, and enable him (however hard it may seem) to give up his own attainments, and sit down like a little child at the feet of Jesus.

I hope to hear soon and often from you. I number my Christian correspondents among my principal blessings; a few judicious pious friends, to whom, when I can get leisure to write, I send my heart by turns. I can trust them with my inmost sentiments, and can write with no more disguise than I think. I shall rejoice to add you to the number, if you can agree to take me as I am (as I think you will), and allow me to commit my whole self to paper, without respect to names, parties, and sentiments. I endeavor to observe my Lord's commands, to call no man master upon earth; yet I desire to own and honor the image of God wherever I find it.

I dare not say I have no bigotry: for I know not myself; and remember to my shame, that formerly, when I ignorantly professed myself free from it, I was indeed overrun with it. But this I can say, I allow it not; I strive and pray against it; and thus far, by the grace of God, I have attained, that I find my heart as much united to many who differ from me in some points, as to any who agree with me in all. **I set no value upon any doctrinal truth, farther than it has a tendency to promote practical holiness.** If others should think those things *hindrances*--which I judge to be *helps* in this respect, I am content they should go on in their own way, according to the light God has given them.

If it should be asked--*Which are the necessary things?* I answer--Those in which the spiritual worshipers of all ages and countries have been agreed. Those, on the contrary, are mere subordinate matters, in which the best men, those who have been the most eminent for faith, prayer, humility, and nearness to God, always have been, and still are, divided in their judgments. Upon this plan, I should think it no hard matter to draw up a form of sound words (whether dignified with the name of a *creed* or not--I care not), to which true believers of all sorts would unanimously subscribe. Suppose it ran something in the following manner:

"I believe that sin is the most hateful thing in the world. I believe that I and all men are by nature in a state of wrath and depravity, utterly unable to sustain the penalty or to fulfill the commands of God's holy law; and that we have no sufficiency of ourselves to think a good thought. I believe that Jesus Christ is the chief among ten thousand; that he came into the world to save the chief of sinners, by making a propitiation for sin by his death, by paying a perfect obedience to the law in our behalf; and that he is now exalted on high, to give repentance and remission of sins to all who believe; and that he ever lives to make intercession for us. I believe that the Holy Spirit (the gift of God through Jesus Christ), is the sure and only guide into all truth, and the common privilege of all believers; and under his influence, I believe the holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, and to furnish us thoroughly for every good work. I believe that love to God, and to man for God's sake, is the essence of true religion, and the fulfilling of the law; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; that those who, by a patient course in well-doing, seek glory, honor, and immortality, shall receive eternal life. And I believe that this reward is not of *debt*--but of *grace*, even to the praise and glory of that grace whereby He has made us accepted in the Beloved. Amen."

I pretend not to accuracy in this hasty draught; they are only outlines, which, if you please to retouch, and fill up at your leisure, I hope you will favor me with a sight of it. I fear I have tired you. I shall only add my prayers, that the Lord may be with you, and crown your labors of love with success, that you may hereafter shine among those who have been instrumental in turning many to righteousness.

Divine revelation

Jury 14, 1775

My Dear Friend,

I confess, I am not a friend to that lukewarmness and indifference for truth, which bears the name of *candor* among many in the present day. I desire to maintain a spirit of candor and benevolence to all men, to wish them well, to do them every good office in my power, and commend what appears to me commendable in a Socinian, as readily as in a Calvinist. But I must judge of *principles* by the Word of God, and of the *tree* by its fruit. I meddle with no man's final state; because I know that He who is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins, can do it whenever, and to whoever, he is pleased. Yet I firmly believe, and I make no scruple of proclaiming it, that swearers, drunkards, adulterers, *continuing such*, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. And I look with no less compassion upon some people whose characters in common life may be respectable, when I see them unhappily blinded by their own carnal wisdom; and, while they account themselves, and are accounted by many others, master-builders in Zion, rejecting the only foundation upon which a sinner's hope can be safely built.

I am far from thinking that the Socinians are all hypocrites—but I think they are all in a most *dangerous error*; nor do their principles exhibit to my view a whit more of the genuine fruits of Christianity than deism itself. You say, "If they are sincere, and fail not for lack of diligence in searching, I cannot help thinking that God will not condemn them for an inevitable defect in their understandings." Indeed, my friend, I have such a low opinion of man in his depraved state, that I believe no one has real sincerity in religious matters—until God bestows it! And when he makes a person sincere in his desires after truth—he will assuredly guide him to the possession of it in due time, as our Lord speaks, John 6:44-45. To suppose that any people can sincerely seek the way of salvation, and yet miss it through an inevitable defect of their understandings, would contradict the plain promises of the Gospel, such as Mat. 7:7-8, John 7:16-17. But to suppose that nothing is necessary to be known, which some people who profess sincerity cannot receive, would be in effect to make the Scripture a nose of wax, and open a wide door for skepticism.

I am not a judge of the heart; but I may be sure that whoever makes the Foundation-stone a rock of offense, cannot be sincere in his inquiries. He may study the Scripture accurately—but he brings his own pre-conceived sentiments with him, and, instead of submitting them to the touchstone of truth, he makes *them* a rule by which he interprets. That those who lean to their own understandings should stumble and miscarry, I cannot wonder; for the same God who has promised to fill the *hungry* with good things, has threatened to send the *rich* empty away. So Mat. 11:25. It is not through defect of understanding—but a lack of *simplicity* and *humility*, that so many stumble like the blind at noon-day, and see nothing of those great truths which are written in the Gospel as with a sun-beam.

You wish me to explain myself concerning the doctrine of the *Trinity*. I will try—yet I know I cannot, any farther than as he who taught me shall be pleased to bear witness in your heart to what I say. My first principle in religion, is what the Scripture teaches me of the utter depravity of human nature. I believe we are by nature sinners, and by practice we are universally transgressors; that we are dead in trespasses and sins; and that the bent of our natural spirit is enmity against the holiness, government, and grace of God. Upon this ground, I see, feel, and acknowledge the necessity of such a salvation as the Gospel proposes; which, at the same time that it precludes boasting, and stains the pride of all human glory, affords encouragement to those who may be thought, or who may think themselves, the weakest or the vilest of mankind.

I believe, that whatever notions a person may take up from education—that no one ever did, or ever will, feel himself and own himself to be such a lost, miserable, hateful sinner—unless he is powerfully and supernaturally convinced by the Spirit of God. When God pleases—there is a certain light thrown into the soul, which differs not merely in degree—but in kind—from anything that can be effected or produced by moral persuasion or argument.

But (to take in another of your queries) the Holy Spirit teaches or reveals no new truths, either of doctrine or precept—but only enables us to understand what is already revealed in the Scripture. Here a change takes place—the person who was spiritually blind begins to see. The sinner's character, as described in the Word of God—he finds to be a description of himself—that he is afar off from God—a stranger to God—a rebel against Him; and that he has hitherto lived in vain! Now he begins to see the necessity of an atonement, an advocate, a shepherd, a comforter. He can no more trust to his own wisdom, strength, and goodness; but, accounting all his former gain but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ—he renounces every other refuge, and ventures his all upon the person, work, and promise of the Redeemer!

In this way, I say, he will find the doctrine of the Trinity not only a proposition—but a principle: that is, from his own needs and situation, he will have an abiding conviction that the Son and Holy Spirit are God, and must be possessed of the attributes and powers of Deity, to support the offices the Scriptures assign them, and to deserve the confidence and worship the Scriptures require to be placed in them, and paid to them. Without this awakened state of mind—a theologian, reputed orthodox, will blunder wretchedly even in defending his own opinions. I have seen labored defenses of the Trinity which have given me not much more satisfaction than I would probably receive from a dissertation upon the rainbow composed by a man blind from his birth!

In effect, the true knowledge of God cannot be attained by studies on our part; it must be by a revelation on his part. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to *reveal* Him." Matthew 11:27. "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not *revealed* to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." Matthew 16:17. This is a revelation, not objectively of new truth—but subjectively of new light in us. Then he who runs may read. Perhaps you may not quite understand my meaning, or not accede to my sentiment at present. I have little doubt, however—but the time is coming when you will. I believe the Lord God has given you that sincerity, which he never disappoints.

Far be it from me to arrogate infallibility to myself, or to any writer or preacher; yet, blessed be God, I am not left to float up and down the uncertain tide of opinion, in those points wherein the peace of my soul is nearly concerned. I know, yes I infallibly know, whom I have believed. I am under no more doubt about the way of salvation, than of the way to London. I cannot be deceived, because the Word of God cannot deceive me.

It is impossible, however, for me to give you, or any person, full satisfaction concerning my evidence, because it is of an *experimental* nature; Rev. 2:17. In general, it arises from the views I have received of the power, compassion, and grace of Jesus, and a consciousness that I, from a conviction of my sin and misery, have fled to him for refuge, entrusted and devoted myself and my all to him. Since my mind has been enlightened, everything within me, and everything around me, confirms and explains to me what I read in Scripture; and though I have reason enough to distrust my own judgment every hour—yet I have no reason to question the great essentials, which the Lord himself has taught me.

I take great pleasure in your correspondence, still more in the thought of your friendship, which I hope to cultivate to the utmost, and to approve myself sincerely and affectionately yours.

Views of Divine truth

June 23, 1775

Dear Sir,

I hope that the Lord will make you comfortable and useful in your present rank as a curate. *Advancement* is not necessary, either to our peace or usefulness. We may live and die contentedly, without the honors and emoluments which aspiring men thirst after, if God is pleased to honor us with a dispensation to preach his Gospel, and to crown our endeavors with a blessing. He who wins souls is wise; wise in the choice of the highest end he can propose to himself in this life; wise in the improvement of the only means by which this desirable end can be attained.

Wherever we cast our eyes, the bulk of the people are ignorant, immoral, careless. They live without God in the world; they are neither awed by his authority, nor affected by his goodness, nor enabled to trust to his promises, nor disposed to aim at his glory. If, perhaps, they have a serious interval, or some comparative sobriety of character, they ground their hopes upon *their own doings, endeavors, or purposes*; and treat the inexpressible love of God revealed in Christ, and the Gospel method of salvation by faith in his name, with neglect, often with contempt.

They have preachers, whom perhaps they hear with some pleasure, because they neither alarm their consciences by insisting on the spirituality and sanction of the Divine Law, nor offend their pride by publishing the humiliating doctrines of that Gospel, which is the power of God through faith unto salvation. Therefore what they do speak, they speak in vain; the world grows worse and worse under their instructions; infidelity and profligacy abound more and more. For God will own no other doctrine but what the Apostle calls *the truth as it is in Jesus*; that doctrine which drives the sinner from all his vain pleas, and points out the Lord Jesus Christ as the only ground of hope, the supreme object of desire, as appointed of God to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, to all who believe in his name.

When ministers themselves are convinced of sin, and feel the necessity of an almighty Savior, they presently account their former gain but loss; and determine, with the Apostle, to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. In proportion as they do this, they are sure to be wondered at, laughed at, and railed at, if the providence of God, and the constitution of their country, secure them from severer treatment. But they have this invaluable compensation, that they no longer speak without effect. In a greater or less degree, a change takes place in their hearers—the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed; sinners are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; sinful practices are forsaken; and a new course of life in the converts, evidences that they have not followed cunningly devised fables, nor taken up with uncertain notions—but that God has indeed quickened them by his Spirit, and given them an understanding to know him who is true.

The preachers, likewise, while they attempt to teach others, are taught themselves: a blessing descends upon their studies and labors, upon their perusal of the Scripture, upon their attention to what passes within them and around them; the events of every day contribute to throw light upon the Word of God; their views of Divine truth grow more enlarged, connected, and comprehensive; many difficulties, which perplexed them at their first setting out, trouble them no more; the God whom they serve, and on whom they wait, reveals to them those great things, which, though plainly expressed in the letter of the Scripture, cannot be understood and realized without Divine teaching; 1Co. 2:9-15. Thus they go on from strength to strength, hard things become easy, and a Divine light shines upon their paths. Opposition

from men perhaps may increase—they may be represented as those who turn the world upside down; the cry "troublers" will be raised against them; the gates of the temple of preferment will be seldom open to them; but they will have the unspeakable consolation of applying to themselves those lively words of the Apostle, "As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." 2 Co. 6:10.

It is the strain of evident sincerity which runs through your letters, that gives me a pleasing confidence the Lord is with you. An unselfish desire of knowing the truth, with a willingness to follow it through all disadvantages, is a preparation of the heart which only God can give. He has directed you to the right method—searching the Scripture, with prayer. Go on, and may his blessing attend you. You may see, from what I have written above, what is the desire of my heart for you. But I am not impatient. Follow your heavenly Leader, and in his own time and manner He will make your way plain. I have traveled the path before you. I see what you yet want; I cannot impart it to you—but He can, and I trust He will. It will rejoice my soul to be any way assistant to you; but I am afraid! should not afford you much, either profit or satisfaction, by entering upon a dry defense of creeds and articles.

The truths of Scripture are not like mathematical theorems, which present exactly the same ideas to every person who understands the terms. The Word of God is compared to a mirror, 2Co. 3:18; but it is a mirror in which—the longer we look, the more we see! The view will be still growing upon us, and still we shall see but *in part* while on this side eternity. When our Lord pronounced Peter blessed, declaring he had learned that which flesh and blood could not have taught him—yet Peter was at that time much in the dark. The sufferings and death of Jesus, though the only and necessary means of his salvation, were an offense to him. But he lived to glory in, what he once could not bear to hear of. Peter had received grace to love the Lord Jesus, to follow him, to venture all and to forsake all for him—these first good dispositions were of God, and they led to further advances.

So it is still. By nature, *SELF* rules in the heart. When this idol is brought low, and we are truly willing to be the Lord's, and to apply to Him for strength and direction, that we may serve Him—the good work is begun. For it is a truth that holds universally and without exception, "*a man can receive nothing except it be given him from God.*" The Lord first finds us when we are thinking of something else (Isa. 65:1), and then we begin to seek him in good earnest, and he has promised to be found of us. People may, by industry and natural abilities, make themselves masters of the external evidences of Christianity, and have much to say for and against different schemes and systems of sentiments; but all this while the heart remains untouched.

True religion is not a science of the *head*—so much as an inward and heart-felt perception, which casts down imaginations, and everything that exalts itself in the mind, and brings every thought into a sweet and willing subjection to Christ by faith. Here the learned have no real advantage above the ignorant; both see when the eyes of the understanding are enlightened; until then, both are equally blind. And *the first lesson in the school of Christ—is to become a little child, sitting simply at his feet, that we may be made wise unto salvation.*

I was not only prevented beginning my letter as soon as I wished—but have been unusually interrupted since I began it. Often, as soon as I could well take the pen in hand, I have been called away to attend company and intervening business. Though I persuade myself, after what I have formerly said, you will put a favorable construction upon my delay—yet it has given me some pain. I set a great value upon your offer of friendship, which I trust will not be interrupted, on either side, by the freedom with which we mutually express our difference of sentiments, when we

are constrained to differ. You please me with entrusting me with the first rough draught of your thoughts; and you may easily perceive by my manner of writing, that I place equal confidence in your candor. I shall be glad to exchange letters as often as it suits us, without constraint, ceremony, or apology—and may He who is always present with our hearts make our correspondence useful. I pray God to be your sun and shield, your light and strength, to guide you with his eye, to comfort you with his gracious presence in your own soul, and to make you a happy instrument of comforting many!

Blemishes in Christian character

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." Philippians 4:8

Dear Sir,

The precept which I have chosen for my motto is applicable to many particulars which are but seldom and occasionally mentioned from the pulpit. There are improprieties of conduct, which, though usually considered as *foibles* which hardly deserve a severe censure, are properly sinful; for though some of them may not seem to violate any express command of Scripture, yet they are contrary to that holiness and circumspection which become our profession. A Christian, by the tenor of his high calling, is bound to avoid even the appearance of evil; and his deportment should not only be upright as to his leading principles, but amiable and engaging, and as free as possible from every inconsistency and blemish. The characters of some valuable people are clouded, and the influence they might otherwise have greatly counteracted, by comparatively *small faults*; yet faults they certainly are; and it would be well if they could be made so sensible of them, and of their ill effects, as that they might earnestly watch, and strive, and pray against them.

I know not how to explain myself better than by attempting the outlines of a few **portraits**, to each of which I apprehend some strong resemblances may be found in real life. I do not wish to set my readers to work to find out such resemblance's among their neighbors; but would advise them to examine carefully, whether they cannot, in one or other of them, discover some traces of their own features: and though I speak of men only, counterparts to the several characters may doubtless be found here and there among the women; for the imperfections and evils of a fallen nature are equally entailed upon both sexes.

'*Austerus*' is a solid and exemplary Christian. He has a deep, extensive, and experimental knowledge of Divine things. Inflexibly and invariably true to his principles, he stems with a noble singularity the torrent of the world, and can neither be bribed nor intimidated from the path of duty. He is a rough diamond of great intrinsic value, and would sparkle with a distinguished luster if he were more polished. But, though the word of God is his daily study, and he prizes the precepts, as well as the promises, more than thousands of gold and silver, there is one precept he seems to have overlooked—"be compassionate and humble." 1 Peter 3:8.

Instead of that gentleness and humility which will always be expected from a professed follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, there is a harshness in his manner, which makes him more admired than beloved; and those who truly love him, often feel more constraint than pleasure when in his company. His intimate friends are satisfied that he is no stranger to true humility of heart; but these are few: by others he is thought proud, dogmatic, and self important; nor can this prejudice against him be easily removed, until he can lay aside that cynical air which he has unhappily contracted.

'*Humanus*' is generous and benevolent. His feelings are lively, and his expressions of them strong. No one is more distant from sordid views, or less influenced by a selfish spirit. His heart burns with love to Jesus, and he is ready to receive with open arms all who love his Savior. Yet, with an upright and friendly spirit, which entitles him to the love and esteem of all who know him, he has not everything we would wish in a friend. In some respects, though not in the most criminal sense, **he bridles not his tongue**. Should you entrust him with a secret—you thereby put it in

the possession of the public. Not that he would willfully betray you; but it is his infirmity: he knows not how to keep a secret; it escapes from him before he is aware. So likewise as to matters of fact: in things which are of great importance, and where he is sufficiently informed, no man has a stricter regard to truth; but in the smaller concerns of common life, whether it be from credulity, or from a strange and blamable inadvertence, he frequently grieves and surprises those who know his real character, by saying what is not strictly true. Thus they to whom he opens his very heart dare not make him returns of equal confidence; and those who in some cases would venture their lives upon his word, in others are afraid of telling a story after him. How lamentable are such blemishes in such a person!

'Prudens' though not of a generous natural temper, is a partaker of that grace which opens the heart, and inspires a disposition to love and to good works. He does not bestow his alms to be seen by men; but those who have the best opportunities of knowing what he does for the relief of others, and of comparing it with his ability, can acquit him in good measure of the charge which another part of his conduct exposes him to. For Prudens is a great economist; and though he would not willingly wrong or injure any person, yet the base means to which he will submit, either to save or gain a penny in what he accounts an honest way, are a great discredit to his profession. He is punctual in fulfilling his engagements; but exceedingly hard, strict, and suspicious in making his bargains. And in his dress, and every article of his personal concerns, he is content to be so much below the station in which the providence of God has placed him, that to those who are not acquainted with his private benefactions to the poor, he appears under the hateful character of a miser, and to be **governed by that love of money** which the Scripture declares to be the root of all evil, and inconsistent with the true love of God and of the saints.

'Volatilis' is sufficiently exact in performing his promises—in such instances as he thinks of real importance. If he bids a person depend upon his assistance, he will not disappoint his expectations. Perhaps he is equally sincere in all his promises at the time of making them; but, for lack of method in the management of his affairs, he is always in a hurry, always too late, and has always some engagement upon his hands with which it is impossible he can comply: yet he goes on in this way, exposing himself and others to continual disappointments. He accepts, without a thought, proposals which are incompatible with each other, and will perhaps undertake to be at two or three different and distant places at the same hour. This has been so long his practice, that nobody now expects him until they see him. In other respects he is a good sort of man; but this **lack of punctuality**, which runs through his whole deportment, puts everything out of course in which he is concerned, abroad and at home. Volatilis excuses himself as well as he can, and chiefly by alleging, that the things in which he fails are of no great consequence. But he would do well to remember, that **truth** is a sacred thing, and ought not to be violated in the smallest matters, without an unforeseen and unavoidable prevention. Such a trifling turn of spirit lessens the weight of a person's character, though he makes no pretensions to piety, and is a still greater blemish in a professor.

'Cessator' is not chargeable with being buried in the cares and business of the present life to the neglect of the one thing needful; but he **greatly neglects the duties of his station**. Had he been sent into the world only to read, pray, hear sermons, and join in pious conversation—he might pass for an eminent Christian. But though it is to be hoped that his abounding in these exercises springs from a heart-attachment to Divine things, his conduct evidences that his judgment is weak, and his views of his Christian calling are very narrow and defective. He does not consider, that waiting upon God in the public and private ordinances is designed, not to excuse us from the discharge of the duties of civil life, but to instruct, strengthen, and qualify us for their performance. His affairs are in disorder, and his family and friends are likely to suffer by his indolence. He thanks God that he is not

worldly-minded; but he is an idle and unfaithful member of society, and causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of. Of such the Apostle has determined, that "if any man will not work, neither should he eat."

'*Curiosus*' is upright and unblamably in his general deportment, and no stranger to the experiences of a true Christian. His conversation upon these subjects is often satisfactory and edifying. He would be a much more agreeable companion, were it not for a **bothersome desire of knowing everybody's business**, and the grounds of every hint that is occasionally dropped in discourse where he is present. This puts him upon asking a multiplicity of needless and improper questions; and obliges those who know him, to be continually upon their guard, and to treat him with reserve. He intrudes even with strangers, and is unwilling to part with them until he is punctually informed of all their connections, employment's and designs. For this idle curiosity he is marked and avoided **as a busy-body**; and those who have the best opinion of him, cannot but wonder that a man, who appears to have so many better things to employ his thoughts, should find time to amuse himself with what does not at all concern him. Were it not for the rules of civility, he would be insulted every day; and if he would attend to the cold and evasive answers he receives to his inquiries, or even to the looks with which they are accompanied, he might learn, that, though he means no harm, he appears to a great disadvantage and that **his prying disposition** is very unpleasant.

'*Querulus*' wastes much of his precious time in declaiming against the management of public affairs; though he has neither access to the springs which move the wheels of government, nor influence either to accelerate or retard their motions. Our national concerns are no more affected by the remonstrance's of Querulus, than the heavenly bodies are by the disputes of astronomers. While the newspapers are the chief sources of his news and his situation precludes him from being a competent judge either of matters of fact or matters of right, why should Querulus trouble himself with **politics**? This would be a weakness, if we consider him only as a member of society; but if we consider him as a Christian, it is worse than weakness; it is a sinful conformity to the men of the world, who look no farther than to second causes, and forget that the Lord reigns.

If a Christian be placed in a public sphere of action, he should undoubtedly be faithful to his calling, and endeavor by all lawful methods to transmit our privileges to posterity: but it would be better for Querulus to let the dead bury the dead. There are people enough to make a noise about political matters, who know not how to employ their **time** to better purpose. Our Lord's kingdom is not of this world; and most of his people may do their country much more essential service by pleading for it in prayer, than by finding fault with things which they have no power to alter. If Querulus had opportunity of spending a few months under some of the governments upon the Continent (I may indeed say under any of them), he would probably bring home with him a more grateful sense of the Lord's goodness to him, in appointing his lot in Britain. As it is, his zeal is not only unprofitable to others, but hurtful to himself. It embitters his spirit, it diverts his thoughts from things of greater importance, and prevents him from feeling the value of those blessings, civil and religious, which he actually possesses. And could he (as he wishes) prevail on many to act in the same spirit, the governing powers might be irritated to take every opportunity of abridging that religious liberty which we are favored with above all the notions upon earth. Let me remind Querulus, that the hour is approaching, when many things, which at present too much engross his thoughts and inflame his passions, will appear as foreign to him, as what is now transacting among the Tartars or Chinese.

Other improprieties of conduct, which lessen the influence and spot the profession of some who wish well to the cause of Christ, might be enumerated, but these may suffice for a specimen.

Conformity to the world

"Be not conformed to this world." Romans 12:2

Dear Sir,

You will perhaps be surprised to see my thoughts on your query in print, rather than to receive them by the post, as you expected. But as the subject of it is of general concern, I hope you will not be displeas'd that I have taken this method. It might be of considerable service in the present day, clearly to explain the force of the Apostle's precept, "Be not conformed to this world;" and to state the just boundary between a sinful compliance with the world, and that scrupulous singularity which springs from a self-righteous principle, and a contracted view of the spirit and liberty of the Gospel. To treat this point accurately, would require a treatise rather than a letter: I only undertake to offer you a few hints; and indeed, when the mind is form'd to a spiritual taste, a simple desire to be guided by the Word and Spirit of God, together with a due attention to our own experience, will, in most practical cases, supersede the necessity of long and elaborate disquisitions.

By the world, in the passage alluded to, Rom. 12:2, I suppose the Apostle means **conformity to the men of the world**, in distinction from believers: these, not having the love of God in their hearts, or his fear before their eyes, are of course engag'd in such pursuits and practices as are inconsistent with our holy calling, and in which we cannot imitate or comply with them, without hurting our peace and our profession. We are therefore bound to avoid conformity to them in all such instances; but we are not oblig'd to decline all interaction with the world, or to impose restraints upon ourselves, when the Scripture does not restrain us, in order to make us as unlike the world as possible. To instance in a few particulars.

It is not necessary, perhaps it is not lawful, wholly to renounce the society of the world. A mistake of this kind took place in the early ages of Christianity, and men (at first, perhaps, with a sincere desire of serving God without distraction) withdrew into deserts and uninhabited places, and wasted their lives at a distance from their fellow-creatures. But *unless we could flee from ourselves* likewise, this would afford us no advantage; so long as we carry our own wicked hearts with us, we shall be expos'd to temptation, go where we will. Besides, this would be thwarting the end of our vocation. Christians are to be the salt and the lights of the world, conspicuous as cities set upon a hill; they are command'd to "let their light shine before men, that they, beholding their good works, may glorify their Father who is in heaven." This injudicious deviation from the paths of nature and providence, gave occasion at length to the vilest abominations; and men who withdrew from the world, under pretense of retirement, became the more wicked and abandoned as they lived more out of public view and observation.

Nor are we at liberty, much less are we enjoined, to renounce the duties of relative life, so as to become careless in the discharge of them. Allowances should, indeed, be made for the distresses of people newly awakened, or under the power of temptation, which may for a time so much engross their thoughts as greatly to indispose them for their bounded duty. But, in general, **the proper evidence of true Christians is, not merely that they can talk about Divine things, but that, by the grace of God, they live and act agreeable to the rules of his word, in the state in which his providence has plac'd them**, whether as masters or servants, husbands or wives, parents or children; bearing rule, or yielding obedience, as in his sight. Diligence and fidelity in the management of temporal concerns, though observable in the practice of many worldly men, may be maintained without a sinful conformity to the world.

Neither are we required to refuse a moderate use of the comforts and conveniences of life, suitable to the station which God has appointed us in the world. The spirit of self-righteousness and will-worship works much in this way, and supposes that there is something excellent in long fasting, in abstaining from pleasant food, in wearing coarser clothes than is customary with those in the same rank of life, and in many other austerities and singularities not commanded by the word of God. And many people, who are in the main sincere, are grievously burdened with scruples respecting the use of lawful things.

It is true, there is need of a constant watch, lest what is lawful in itself becomes hurtful to us by its abuse. But these outward strictnesses may be carried to great lengths, without a spark of true grace, and even without the knowledge of the true God. The mortifications and austerities practiced by the Bramins in India are vastly more severe than the most zealous effects of modern superstition in our country. There is a strictness which arises rather from ignorance than knowledge, is wholly taken up with externals, and gratifies the spirit of self as much in one way, as it seems to retrench it in another. A man may almost starve his body to feed his pride: but to those who fear and serve the Lord, every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the precept is very extensive and important. "Be not conformed to the world." As believers, we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Heaven is our country, and the Lord is our King. We are to be known and noticed as his subjects; and therefore it is his pleasure, that we do not speak the sinful language, or adopt the sinful customs, of the land in which we sojourn. We are not to conform to the world, as we did in the days of our ignorance. And though we have received the principles of grace, and have tasted of the goodness of the Lord, the admonition is still needful; for we are renewed but in part, and are liable to be drawn aside to our hurt by the prevalence of evil examples and customs around us.

We must not conform to the spirit of the world. As members of society, we have a part to act in it, in common with others. But if our business is the same, our principles and ends are to be entirely different. Diligence in our respective callings is, as I have already observed, commendable, and our duty; but not with the same views which stimulate the activity of the men of the world. If they rise early, and take rest late, their endeavors spring from and terminate in *self*, to establish and increase their own importance, to add house to house, and field to field, that, like the builders of Babel, they may get themselves a name, or provide means for the gratification of their sinful passions. If they succeed, they sacrifice to themselves; if they are crossed in their designs, they are filled with anxiety and impatience; they either murmur or despond.

But a Christian is to pursue his lawful calling with an eye to the providence of God, and with submission to his wisdom. Thus, so far as he acts in the exercise of faith, he cannot be disappointed. He casts his care upon his Heavenly Father, who has promised to take care of him. What God gives, he receives with thankfulness, and is careful as a faithful steward to improve it for the furtherance of the cause of God, and the good of mankind. And if he meets with losses and crosses, he is not disconcerted, knowing that all his concerns are under a Divine direction; that the Lord whom he serves, chooses for him better than he could choose for himself; and that his best treasure is safe, out of the reach of the various changes to which all things in the present state are liable.

We must not conform to the maxims of the world. The world in various instances calls evil good, and good evil. But we are to have recourse to the law and to the testimony, and to judge of things by the unerring word of God, uninfluenced by the determination of the great, or the many. We are to obey God rather than man,

though upon this account we may expect to be despised or reviled, to be made a gazing-stock or a laughing-stock to those who set his authority at defiance. We must bear our testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, avow the cause of his despised people, and walk in the practice of universal obedience, patiently endure reproaches, and labor to overcome evil with good. Thus we shall show that we are not ashamed of Him. And there is an hour coming when he will not be ashamed of us, who have followed him, and borne his cross in the midst of a perverse generation, but will own our worthless names before the assembled world.

We must not conform to the world in their amusements and diversions. We are to mix with the world so far as our necessary and providential connections engage us, so far as we have a reasonable expectation of doing or getting good, and no farther. "What fellowship has light with darkness, or what concord has Christ with Belial?" What does a believer have to do into those places and companies, where everything tends to promote a spirit of dissipation; where the fear of God has no place; where things are purposely disposed to inflame or indulge corrupt and sinful appetites and passions, and to banish all serious thoughts of God and ourselves? If it is our duty to redeem time, to walk with God, to do all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to follow the example which he set us when he was upon earth, and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling; it must of course be our duty to avoid a conformity with the world in those vain and sensual amusements, which stand in as direct contradiction to a spiritual frame of mind, as darkness to light.

The leading desires of every person under the influence of Gospel principles, will be, to maintain an habitual communion with God in his own soul, and to manifest the power of his grace in the sight of men. **So far as a Christian is infected by a conformity to the spirit, maxims, and sinful customs of the world, these desires will be disappointed.** Fire and water are not more opposite, than that peace of God which passes all understanding, and that poor precarious pleasure which is sought in a compliance with the world; a pleasure (if worthy the name) which grieves the Spirit of God, and stultifies the heart. Whoever, after having tasted that the Lord is gracious, has been prevailed on to make the experiment, and to mingle with the world's vanities, has certainly thereby brought a damp upon his experience, and indisposed himself for the exercise of prayer, and the contemplation of Divine truths. And if any are not sensible of a difference in this respect, it is because the poison has taken a still deeper effect, so as to benumb their spiritual senses. Conformity to the world is the bane of many professors in this day. They have found a way, as they think, to serve both God and Mammon. But because they are double-minded, they are unstable; they make no progress; and, notwithstanding their frequent attendance upon ordinances, they are lean from day to day; a form of godliness, a scheme of orthodox notions, they may attain to, but they will remain destitute of the life, power, and comfort of piety, so long as they cleave to those things which are incompatible with it.

Conformity to the world is equally an obstruction in the way of those who profess a desire of glorifying God in the sight of men. Such professors do rather dishonor him. By their conduct, as far as in them lies, they declare, that they do not find the religion of the Gospel answer their expectations; that it does not afford them the satisfaction they once hoped for from it; and that therefore they are forced to seek relief from the world. They grieve the people of God by their compliances, and oftentimes they mislead the weak, and by their examples encourage them to venture upon the like liberties, which otherwise they dared not have attempted. They embolden the wicked likewise in their evil ways, while they see *a manifest inconsistency between their avowed principles and their practice*; and thus they cause the ways of truth to be evil spoken of. The length of this paper constrains me to conclude abruptly. May the Lord enable you and I to lay this subject to heart, and to pray that we may, on the one hand, rightly understand and prize our Christian

liberty; and, on the other hand, be preserved from that growing evil—a sinful conformity to the world!

A Christian's present blessedness

Dear sir,

The Apostle speaks of a blessedness, which it is the design of the Gospel to impart to those who receive it. The Galatians once had it, and spoke of it. The Apostle reminds them of their loss, which is left upon record as a warning to us. His expression has led me sometimes to consider wherein a **Christian's present blessedness** consists: I mean that which is attainable in this state of trial, and the sense and exercise of which may be, and too often is, suspended and taken from us. It is a blessedness which, if we speak of man in a natural state, his eye has not seen, nor his ear heard so as to understand it, nor can the idea of it arise in his heart. It is no way dependent upon outward circumstances. Prosperity cannot impart it, preserve, or supply the lack of it; nor can adversity put it out of our reach. The wise cannot acquire it by dint of superior abilities; nor shall the simple miss it for lack of capacity.

The state of true believers, compared with that of others, is always *blessed*. If they are born from above, and united to Jesus, they are delivered from condemnation, and are heirs of eternal life, and may therefore well be accounted happy. But I consider now, not their harvest—but their first-fruits; not their portion in reversion—but the portion attainable in this life; not what they shall be in heaven—but what, in an humble attendance upon the Lord, they may be while upon earth.

There is even at present, a prize of our high calling set before us. It is much to be desired, that we had such a sense of its value as might prompt us so to run that we might obtain. I have thought this blessedness may be comprised in five particulars; though, in order to take a succinct view of the subject, some of these might be branched out into several others; but I would not, by too many subdivisions, give my letter the air of a sermon.

In the first place, **a clear, well-grounded, habitual persuasion of our acceptance in the Beloved, is attainable**; and though we may *be* safe, we cannot be said to enjoy blessedness without it. To be in a state of suspense and uncertainty in a point of so great importance, is painful; and the Lord has accordingly provided that his people may have strong consolation on this head. They are blessed, therefore, who have such views of the power, grace, and suitableness of Jesus, and the certainty and security of redemption in him, together with such a consciousness that they have anchored their hopes, and ventured their all, upon his person, work, and promise—as furnishes them with a ready answer to all the cavils of unbelief and Satan, in the Apostle's manner, Romans 8:31-37. That Paul could thus challenge and triumph over all charges and enemies, was not an appendage of His office as an apostle—but a part of his experience as a believer; and it lies equally open to us. For we have the same Gospel and the same promises as he had; nor is the efficacy of the Holy Spirit's teaching a whit weakened by length of time.

But many stop short of this. They have a hope—but it rather springs from their *frames* and *feelings*, than from a spiritual apprehension of the Redeemer's engagements and fullness, and therefore fluctuates and changes like the weather. Could they be persuaded to pray with earnestness and importunity, as the Apostle prays for them, Eph. 1:17-18, and Eph. 3:16-19, they would find a blessedness which they have not yet known; for it is said, "Ask—and you shall receive;" and it is said likewise, "You receive not—because you ask not."

Could this privilege be enjoyed singly, the natural man would have no objection to it. He would (as he thinks) be pleased to know he would be saved at last—provided that while here he might live in his sins. But the believer will not, cannot think

himself blessed, unless he has likewise a conscience void of offense. This was the Apostle's daily exercise, though no one was farther from a legal spirit, or more dependent upon Jesus for acceptance. But if we live in any known sin, or allow ourselves in the customary omission of any known duty, supposing it possible in such a case to preserve a sense of our acceptance (which can hardly be supposed, for if the *Spirit* is grieved, our *evidences* decline of course)—yet we could not be easy.

If a traveler was absolutely sure of reaching his journey's end in safety; yet if he walked with a thorn in his foot, he must take every step in pain. Such a thorn will be felt in the conscience, until we are favored with a simplicity of heart, and made willing in all things, great or small, to yield obedience to the authority of the Lord's precepts, and make them the standing rule of our conduct, without willfully admitting a single exception. At the best, we shall be conscious of innumerable short-comings, and shameful defilement; but these things will not break our peace, if our hearts are upright. But if we trifle with God's Word, and connive at what we know to be wrong, we shall be weak, restless, and uncomfortable. How many, who we would hope are the children of the King, are lean from day to day, because some right-hand or right-eye evil, which they cannot persuade themselves to part with—keeps them halting between two opinions! and they are as distant from happiness, as they are from the possibility of reconciling the incompatible services of God and the world. But happy indeed is he who condemns not himself, in his conduct.

Real communion with the Lord, in his appointed means of grace, is likewise an important branch of this blessedness. They were instituted for this end, and are sufficient, by virtue of his power and Spirit, to answer it. I do not believe this enjoyment will be always equal; but I believe a comfortable sense of it, in some measure, is generally attainable. To read the *Scripture*, not as an *attorney* may read a will, merely to know the sense—but as the *heir* reads it, as a description and proof of his interest; to hear the *Gospel* as the voice of our Beloved, so as to have little leisure either for admiring the abilities or censuring the defects of the preacher; and, in *prayer*, to feel a liberty of pouring out our hearts before the Lord, to behold some glances of his goodness passing before us, and to breathe forth before him the temper of a child, the spirit of adoption; and thus, by beholding his glory, to be conformed more and more to his image, and to renew our strength by drawing water out of the wells of salvation— herein is blessedness! Those who have tasted it can say, *It is good for me to draw near to God!*

The soul thus refreshed by the water of life, is preserved from thirsting after the vanities of the world; thus instructed in the sanctuary, comes down from the mount filled with heavenly wisdom, anointed with a holy unction, and thereby qualified to judge, speak, and act in character, in all the relations and occasions of secular life. In this way, a spiritual taste is acquired, something analogous to the meaning of the word *taste* when applied to music or good-breeding; by which discords and improprieties are observed and avoided, as it were by instinct; and what is right is felt and followed, not so much by the force of rules, as by a *habit insensibly acquired*, and in which the substance of all necessary rules are, if I may so say, *digested*. O that I knew more of this blessedness, and more of its effects!

Another branch of blessedness, is a **power of reposing ourselves and all our concerns upon the Lord's faithfulness and care**; and may be considered in two respects—a reliance upon him that he will surely provide for us, guide us, protect us; be our help in trouble, our shield in danger; so that, however poor, weak, and defenseless in ourselves, we may rejoice in his all-sufficiency as our own. And farther, in consequence of this, a peaceful, humble submission to his will, under all events which, upon their first impression, are contrary to our own views and desires. Surely, in a world like this, where everything is uncertain, where we are exposed to trials on every hand, and know not but a single hour may bring forth something

painful, yes dreadful, to our natural sensations, there can be no blessedness—but so far as we are thus enabled to entrust and resign all to the direction and faithfulness of the Lord our Shepherd.

For lack of more of this spirit, multitudes of professing Christians perplex and wound themselves, and dishonor their high calling, by continual anxieties, alarms, and complaints. They think nothing safe under the Lord's keeping, unless *their* own eye is likewise upon it; and are seldom satisfied with any of his dispensations. For though he gratifies their desires in nine instances, a refusal in the tenth spoils the relish of all, and they show the truths of the Gospel can afford them little comfort—if *self* is crossed. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings—he shall be kept in perfect peace, though the earth is moved, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea!

The paper admonishes me it is time to end—and I have not room to detain you long upon the fifth particular. It belongs to a believer's blessedness, **to feel his spirit cheerful and active for the Lord's service in the world**. For to what other end should he wish to live? If he thought of himself only—it would be better to depart and be with Jesus immediately. But he is a debtor to his grace and love; and though, strictly, he can make no returns—yet he longs to show his thankfulness. And if the Lord gives him a heart to redeem his time, to devote his strength and influence, and lay himself out for his service, that he may be instrumental in promoting his cause, in comforting his people; or enable him to let his light shine before men, that his God and Father may be honored; he will account it blessedness. This is indeed the great end of life, and he knows it will evidently appear so at the approach of death; and therefore, while others are cumbered about many things—he esteems this the one thing needful.

COVETOUSNESS

October 2, 1795

"For of this you can be sure: that no *sexually immoral* or *impure* nor *covetousness* person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Ephesians 5:5

What is covetousness?

Covetousness is a **besetting** sin, from which few people are entirely free.

Covetousness is eminently a **deceitful** sin! It is decried and condemned in others—by multitudes who live in the habit of it themselves! It is very difficult to fix a conviction of this sin—upon those who are guilty of it!

Whether drunkards or profligates regard the warnings of the preacher or not, when he declares that those who persist in those evil practices, shall not inherit the kingdom of God—they know at least their own characters, and are sensible that they are the people intended.

But if the preacher adds, "nor the covetousness person—such a man is an idolater" —the covetous man usually sits unmoved, and is more ready to apply the threatening to his neighbor—than to himself! If he is willing to entertain the minister sometimes at his table; if he now and then gives a few dollars to some charity—he does not suspect that he is liable to the charge of covetousness!

There are two words in the Greek Testament, which are rendered covetousness in our version. The one literally signifies, "the love of money"; the other, "a desire of more". The senses are indeed concurrent, for no man would *desire* more of that which he does not *love*; and as he who loves silver cannot be satisfied with the silver that he already possesses—he will of course desire more.

Money is generally loved and valued at first, as a means of procuring other things which appear desirable; but many, who begin thus, are brought at length to love money for its own sake. Such people are called *misers*. We meet with those who, so far from being benevolent to *others*—are cruel to *themselves*, and, though abounding in wealth, can hardly afford themselves the necessities of life. But a man may be very covetous, though, not being yet given up to this mental infatuation—he may congratulate himself, and thank God that "he is not a miser!"

I consider covetousness as the most generally prevailing and ensnaring sin, by which professors of the gospel, in our materialistic society, are hindered in their spiritual progress. A disposition deeply rooted in our fallen nature, strengthened by the custom of all around us, the power of habit, and the fascinating charm of wealth—is not easily counteracted.

If we are, indeed, genuine believers in Christ—we are bound by obligation, and required by our Scriptural rule—to set our affections on the things that are above, not on the things on the earth. Christ has called us out of the world, and cautioned us against conformity to its spirit. While we are in the world—it is our duty, privilege, and honor, to manifest that grace—which has delivered us from the love of the world. Christians must indeed eat and drink, and may buy and sell, as other people do. But the principles, motives, and ends of their conduct, are entirely different—they are to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior, and to do all for His glory!

By His wisdom and providence, he places them in different situations, that the power and sufficiency of his grace may appear under a great variety of outward circumstances. He gives them **talents**, to some more, to others less; but all to be improved for him. Whether they are rich or poor, bond or free, they are so by his appointment—with which, if they cheerfully comply, they shall, in due time, be sensible that he chooses better for them, than they could have chosen for themselves.

The *language of faith*, when in exercise, will not be, "What is most conducive to my *temporal* ease and prosperity?" But "What will give me the best opportunity of glorifying him, who has bought me with his blood, and called me out of darkness into his marvelous light? Too much of my **time** has already been wasted—how shall I improve the *little uncertain remainder of my time* for his service? I am too short-sighted to judge for myself—but he has thus far determined it. I am where he has placed me; and the calling in which his mercy found me, (if it be a lawful one,) is that in which, for the present, I am to abide, as the best for me. When it ceases to be so, I may depend upon him to appoint me another. But, until then, I desire to be contented with such things as I have, and to be thankful for them. He knows my frame, my feelings, my needs, and my trials; he permits, yes, invites me to cast all my cares upon him. He assures me that he cares for me, and therefore I only wish to do or to suffer according to his will *today*, and to leave the concerns of *tomorrow* in his hands. While I live—may I live for him! And when I die—may I go to him! May his grace be sufficient for me—and all shall be well."

The Christian knows, or should know, that it is not necessary to be rich, or to be admired or envied by the vain unthinking world—and that it is absolutely necessary for him to maintain peace of conscience, communion with God, and a cheerful activity of spirit in his service. And, as his gracious Lord accepts him, not according to what he actually *does*—but according to what he *would do* if he could, so that he who can only give a cup of cold water to a prophet, in the name of a prophet, should receive a prophet's reward; in this respect all his people, however differently situated, are exactly upon a par. Luke. 21:3-4.

But, alas! how many who profess to know and value the gospel are far otherwise minded! The chief mark of their profession is their attendance upon the Sunday service! At other times, and in

other respects—they are not easily distinguished from the world. If their houses, furniture, tables, and other belongings, secure them from the suspicion of being misers, the manner in which they seek worldly things, sufficiently proves them to be covetous. If, when they can find leisure to speak of religion, they complain that their frames are low, and that they have but little comfort in the ways of God; this is the most favorable token we can find to encourage our hope that, in the midst of all their hurry, there may be a *latent sincerity* at the bottom. For how can it be otherwise, if they had a spark of spiritual life and grace in their hearts, while they attempt to look two ways at once, and to reconcile the incompatible claims of God and mammon? Their love of money, and the desire of more—are always in exercise. As to these, their frames seldom vary, from the beginning to the end of the year. They rise early, go to bed late, and *eat the bread of worry*—that they may be able to vie with the world in their possessions, and to lay up snares, and thorns, and encumbrances for their children!

Often, when already possessed of a lawful employment, which affords a competence for a comfortable support, if opportunity offers, they eagerly catch at some other prospect of gain, though they thereby double their anxieties, and encroach still more upon that time (too little before) which they should afford to allot to the concerns of their souls. Such opportunities they call *providential openings*, and perhaps say they are thankful for them; not considering that such openings of Providence are frequently *temptations or tests*, which the Lord permits a man to meet with, to prove what is in his heart, and to try him, whether he will hold fast his integrity or not, and whether his affections be indeed set on the things above—or still cleave to the earth.

It is sometimes the pleasure of the Lord, to give a servant of his—what the world calls 'prosperity'. He places him in a line of life suited to his desire and ability, prepares a plain path before him, and, by a blessing upon his industry and economy, the man, perhaps, from small beginnings, increases in wealth, almost imperceptibly, with little other solicitude on his own part, than a *faithful attention to the duties of his calling* from day to day. Such a person is a public benefit. The Lord, who *gives* him riches, teaches him likewise how to *use* them. He chiefly values the increase of his property and influence, as they enlarge his sphere of Christian usefulness. He is ready and active to promote the cause of God in the world, and to relieve the needs and miseries of his fellow-creatures. He is eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; the friend of the fatherless and the widow. People of this character are to be found among us; but, compared with the bulk of professors, the world swallows up the most of them!

For those who, as the apostle expresses it, "*long to be rich*," who will strain every nerve to load themselves with *thick clay*, and to be found in the list of those who gain much money—may, and often do, obtain the *poor reward* they seek. As in the case of Israel, when, not satisfied with *bread* from heaven, they importunately clamored for *meat* likewise; God gives them their desire—but sends leanness withal into their *souls*. They expose

themselves to temptations and snares, to foolish passions and pursuits; and thus too many, who promised fair at the first setting out, are drowned in destruction and perdition! For it is written in the Scripture, that "no covetous man, who is an idolater, shall inherit the kingdom of God!" And the Scriptures cannot be broken!

At the best, if they do not finally perish, they are in great danger of erring from the faith, and certainly pierce themselves through with many sorrows—for the love of money is the root of all evil. We may err from the faith, without changing the form of our creed, or imbibing doctrinal errors. Faith is an active, powerful principle; it realizes things unseen, it leads to the throne of grace, it feeds upon the Word of life, it desires and obtains communion with God, and power from the Spirit of grace, by which it purifies the heart, works by love, and overcomes the world. These are the sure effects of faith; and he who does not in some measure experience them in himself, may have an *opinion*, a *notion* of the truths of the gospel, and may be right in *theory*; but he is either an utter stranger to the faith of God's people—or has greatly erred from it!

"For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows!" 1 Timothy 6:10. Who can enumerate the many sorrows with which the covetous and worldly-minded professor is pierced! Especially if it is the Lord's pleasure to be gracious to him, and he purposes to bring him at last out of the snares in which he is entangled. Then, sooner or later, his schemes are broken; losses, crosses, disappointments, and anxieties, wear down his spirit. Improper connections, which he would form, because he would be rich, become thorns in his sides and in his eyes! He trusted in men—and men deceive him! He leaned upon a weak reed—which breaks, and he falls. Thus he finds that *the way of transgressors and backsliders is hard!* His distresses are aggravated by the voice of conscience, which will speak, and will be heard, "Have you not procured these things to yourself, in that you have forsaken the Lord your God, when he led you along the way?"

Covetousness, or the love of the world, is one great cause of the many trials we meet with in life. The principle of this evil is so strong in us, and so powerfully nourished by almost everything around us, that it is seldom suppressed, but by a course of sharp discipline. Many people have now reason to be thankful for those dispensations of Providence which once seemed most severe. If the Lord had not seasonably defeated their plans of life, withered their gourds, broken their cisterns, and wounded them where they were most keenly sensible—they might, yes, they would have gone on from bad to worse! But losses are gains, and the heaviest trials are mercies—when sanctified to bring us to our right minds, and to guide our feet into the paths of peace!

If therefore, my dear reader, you wish to avoid trouble, and to pass through life as smoothly as possible, take heed and beware of covetousness! If the Lord loves you, he will not lose you; and

therefore he will beat you, as it were, in a mortar, if necessary, rather than permit that covetousness to remain in you which his soul abhors, and which, if it were to remain, would exclude you from his kingdom. He has said, and daily experience and observation confirm his aphorism, "A man's life (the real comforts of it) consists not in the abundance of things which he possesses." Gold cannot communicate peace of mind, nor compensate for the lack of it. Surely those who are satisfied with a little of this world's goods, must be more happy than those who are not satisfied with a great deal. Remember likewise, that where much is given, much will be required; and seriously consider, what will it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul!

Difficulties and snares

April 15, 1776.

My dear Sir,

I often rejoice on your behalf. Your call out of the world was a singular, comfortable instance of the power of grace. And when I consider the **difficulties and snares** of your situation, and that you have been kept in the middle path, preserved from undue compliances on the one hand, and unnecessary singularities on the other, I cannot doubt but the Lord has hitherto helped and guided you. Indeed you have need of his guidance. At your young years, and with your expectations in life, your health firm, and your natural spirits lively—you are exposed to many snares. Yet if the Lord keeps you sensible of your danger, and dependent upon him, you will walk safely. Your security, success, and comfort, depend upon him; and in the way of means of grace—chiefly upon your being preserved in a humble sense of your own weakness.

It is written, "Fear not, I am with you." It is written again, "Blessed is the man who fears always." There is a perfect harmony in those seemingly different texts. May the wisdom which comes from above, teach you and I to keep them both united in our view. If the Lord is with us—we have no cause of fear. His *eye* is upon us, his *arm* is over us, his *ear* is open to our prayer; his grace sufficient, his promise unchangeable. Under his protection, though the path of duty should lie through fire and water—we may cheerfully and confidently pursue it.

On the other hand, our hearts are so deceitful, fallible, and frail; our spiritual enemies so subtle, watchful, and powerful; and they derive so many advantages from the occasions of every day, in which we are unavoidably and unexpectedly concerned; there is so much combustible materials within us, and so many temptations arising from without, capable of setting all in a flame; that we cannot be too jealous of ourselves and our circumstances.

When we can say, in the Psalmist's spirit, "*Hold me up*" we may warrantably draw his conclusion, "*and I shall be safe!*" But the moment we lean to our own strength and wisdom—we are in imminent danger of falling. The enemy who wars against our souls, is a consummate master in his subtle devices, prolific in stratagems, and equally skillful in carrying on his assaults by sap or by storm. He studies us, if I may so say, all round, to discover our weak sides. He is a very *proteus* for changing his appearances, and can appear as a sly serpent, a roaring lion, or an angel of light—as best suits his purpose. It is a great mercy to be in some measure acquainted with his devices, and aware of them. Those who wait humbly upon the Lord, and consult carefully at his word and throne of grace, are made wiser than their enemy—and enabled to escape and withstand his wiles.

I know you will not expect me to apologize for putting you in mind of these things, though you know them. I have a double warrant; the love I bear you, and the Lord's command, Heb. 3:13. Use the like freedom with me; I need it, and hope to be thankful for it, and accept it as one of the best proofs of friendship.

May the Lord bless and keep you. Pray for us, and believe me to be sincerely yours.