

THE BELIEVERS  
GROWTH  
IN  
GRACE

LETTERS

BY

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Letters by John Newton

## The Believers Growth in Grace.

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# The Believers Growth in Grace

## or Grace in the Blade

"First the **blade**, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Mark 4:28

Dear Sir,

According to your desire, I sit down to give you my general views of a *progressive work of grace*, in the several stages of a believer's experience; which I shall mark by the different characters, A, B, C, answerable to the distinctions our Lord teaches us to observe from the growth of the corn, Mark 4:28. The Lord leads all his people effectually and savingly to the knowledge of the same essential truths, but in such a variety of methods, that it will be needful, in this disquisition, to set aside, as much as possible, such things as may be only personal and occasional in the experience of each, and to collect those only which in a greater or less degree are common to them all. I shall not therefore give you a copy of my own experience, or of that of any individual; but shall endeavor, as clearly as I can, to state *what the Scripture teaches us concerning the nature and essentials of a work of grace, so far as it will bear a general application to all those who are the subjects of gracious operations.*

By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins; not only strangers to God, but in a state of enmity and opposition to his government and grace. In this respect, whatever difference there may be in the characters of men as members of society, they are all, whether wise or ignorant, whether sober or profane, equally incapable of receiving or approving Divine truths. 1Co. 2:14. On this ground our Lord declares, "No man can come unto me, unless the Father who has sent me draws him." Though the term *Father* most frequently expresses a known and important distinction in the adorable Trinity, I apprehend our Lord sometimes uses it to denote God, or the Divine Nature, in contradistinction from his humanity, as in John 14:9. And this I take to be the sense here: "No man can come unto me unless he is taught of God," and wrought upon by a Divine power. The immediate exertion of this power, according to the economy of salvation, is rather ascribed to the Holy Spirit than to the Father, John 16:8-11. But it is the power of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore severally attributed to the Father, Son, and Spirit: John 5:21, and John 6:44-63; 2Co. 3:18; 2Th. 3:5.

By A; or grace in the blade, I would understand a person who is under the drawings of God, which will infallibly lead him to the Lord Jesus Christ for life and salvation. The beginning of this work is instantaneous. It is effected by a certain kind of light communicated to the soul, to which it was before all utter stranger. The eyes of the understanding are opened and enlightened. The light at first afforded is weak and indistinct, like the morning dawn; but when it is once begun, it will certainly increase and spread to the perfect day. We commonly speak as if conviction of sin was the first work of God upon the soul, that he is in mercy about to draw unto himself. But I think this is inaccurate. Conviction is only a part, or rather an immediate effect, of that first work; and there are many convictions which do not at all spring from it, and therefore are only occasional and temporary, though for a season they may be very sharp, and put a person upon doing many things.

In order to a due conviction of sin, we must previously have some adequate conceptions of the God with whom we have to do. Sin may be feared as dangerous without this; but its nature and demerit can only be understood by being contrasted with the holiness, majesty, goodness, and truth, of the God against whom it is committed. No outward means, no mercies, judgments, or ordinances, can communicate such a discovery of God, or produce such a conviction of sin, without the concurrence of this Divine light and power to the soul. The natural conscience and passions may be indeed so far wrought upon by outward means, as to stir up some desires and endeavors; but if these are not founded in a spiritual apprehension

of the perfection's of God, according to the revelation he has made of himself in his word, they will sooner or later come to nothing; and the person affected will either return by degrees to his former ways, 2Pe. 2:20, or he will sink into a self-righteous form of godliness, destitute of the power. Luke 18:11.

And therefore, as there are so many things in the dispensation of the Gospel suited to work upon the natural passions of men, the many woeful miscarriages and apostasies among professors are more to be lamented than wondered at. For though the seed may seem to spring up, and look green for a season, if there is not depth for it to take root, it will surely wither away. We may be unable to judge with certainty upon the first appearance of a religious profession, whether the work be thus deep and spiritual or not; but "the Lord knows those who are his;" and wherever it is real, it is an infallible token of salvation.

Now, as God only thus reveals himself by the medium of Scripture truth, the light received this way leads the soul to the Scripture from whence it springs, and all the leading truths of the word of God soon begin to be perceived and assented to. The evil of sin is acknowledged; the evil of the heart is felt. There may be for a while some efforts to obtain the favor of God by prayer, repentance, and reformation; but, for the most part, it is not very long before these things are proved to be vain and ineffectual. The soul, like the woman mentioned Mark 5:26, wearied with vain expedients, finds itself worse and worse, and is gradually brought to see the necessity and sufficiency of the Gospel salvation.

He may be a believer thus far: That he believes the word of God, sees and feels things to be as they are there described, hates and avoids sin, because he knows it is displeasing to God, and contrary to his goodness: he receives the record which God has given of his Son; he has his heart affected and drawn to Jesus by views of his glory, and of his love to poor sinners; he ventures upon his name and promises as it's only encouragement to come to a Throne of Grace; he waits diligently in the use of all means appointed for the communion and growth of grace; he loves the Lord's people, accounts them the excellent of the earth, and delights in their conversation. He is longing, waiting, and praying, for a share in those blessings which he believes they enjoy, and can be satisfied with nothing less. He is convinced of the power of Jesus to save him; but, through remaining ignorance and legality, the remembrance of sins previously committed, and the sense of present corruption, he often questions his willingness; and, not knowing the aboundings of grace, and the security of the promises, he fears lest the compassionate Savior should spurn him from his feet.

While he is thus young in the knowledge of the Gospel, burdened with sin, and perhaps beset with Satan's temptations, the Lord, "who gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom," is pleased at times to favor him with cordials, that he may not be swallowed up with over-much sorrow. Perhaps his heart is enlarged in prayer, or under hearing, or some good promise is brought home to His mind, and applied with power and sweetness. He mistakes the nature and design of these comforts, which are not given him to rest in, but to encourage him to press forward. He thinks he is then right because he has them, and fondly hopes to have them always. Then his mountain stands strong. But before long he feels a change: his comforts are withdrawn; he finds no heart to pray; no attention in hearing; indwelling sin revives with fresh strength, and perhaps Satan returns with redoubled rage. Then he is at his wits' end; thinks his hopes were presumptuous, and his comforts delusions. He wants to feel something that may give him a warrant to trust in the free promises of Christ. His views of the Redeemer's gracefulness are very narrow: he sees not the harmony and glory of the Divine attributes in the salvation of a sinner: he sighs for mercy, but fears that justice is against him. However, by these changing dispensations, the Lord is training him up, and bringing him forward. He receives grace from Jesus, whereby he is enabled to fight against sin:

his conscience is tender, his troubles are chiefly spiritual troubles; and he thinks, if he could but attain a sure and abiding sense of his acceptance in the Beloved, hardly any outward trial would be capable of giving him much disturbance.

Indeed, notwithstanding the weakness of his faith, and the prevalence of a legal spirit, which greatly hurts him, there are some things in his present experience which he may, perhaps, look back upon with regret hereafter, when his hope and knowledge will be more established. Particularly that sensibility and keenness of appetite with which he now attends the ordinances, desiring the sincere milk of the word with earnestness and eagerness, as a babe does the breast. He counts the hours from one opportunity to another; and the attention and desire with which he hears, may be read in his countenance. His zeal is likewise lively; and may be, for lack of more experience, too importunate and forward. He has a love for souls, and a concern for the glory of God; which, though it may at some times create him trouble, and at others be mixed with some undue motions of self, yet in its principle is highly desirable and commendable. John 18:10.

**The grace of God influences both the understanding and the affections. Warm affections, without knowledge, can rise no higher than superstition; and that knowledge which does not influence the heart and affections will only make a hypocrite.** The true believer is rewarded in both respects; yet we may observe, that though 'A' is not without knowledge, this state is more usually remarkable for the warmth and liveliness of the affections. On the other hand, as the work advances, though the affections are not left out, yet it seems to be carried on principally in the understanding. The old Christian has more solid, judicious, connected views of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glories of his person and redeeming love: hence his hope is more established, his dependence more simple, and his peace and strength, more abiding and uniform, than in the case of a young convert; but the latter has, for the most part, the advantage in point of sensible fervency.

A tree is most valuable when laden with ripe fruit, but it has a peculiar beauty when in blossom. It is spring-time with 'A'. He is in bloom, and, by the grace and blessing of the heavenly Farmer, will bear fruit in old age. His faith is weak, but his heart is warm. He will seldom venture to think himself a believer; but he sees, and feels, and does those things which no one could, unless the Lord was with him. The very desire and bent of his soul is to God, and to the word of his grace. His knowledge is but small, but it is growing every day. If he is not a *father* or a *young man* in grace, he is a dear *child*. The Lord has visited his heart, delivered him from the love of sin, and fixed his desires supremely upon Jesus Christ. The spirit of bondage is gradually departing from him, and the hour of liberty, which he longs for, is approaching, when, by a farther discovery of the glorious Gospel, it shall be given him to know his acceptance, and to rest upon the Lord's finished salvation. We shall then take notice of him by the name of 'B', in a second letter, if you are not unwilling that I should prosecute the subject.

### **B; or, Grace in the Ear**

"First the blade, then the **ear**, after that the full corn in the ear." Mark 4:28

Dear Sir,

The manner of the Lord's work in the hearts of his people is not easily traced; though the fact is certain, and the evidence demonstrable from Scripture. In attempting to explain it, we can only speak in general, and are at a loss to form such a description as shall take in the immense variety of cases which occur in the experience of believers. I have already attempted such a general delineation of a young convert, under the character of 'A', and am now to speak of him by the name of 'B'.

This state I suppose to commence, when the soul, after an interchange of hopes and fears, according to the different frames it passes through, is brought to rest in Jesus, by a spiritual apprehension of his complete suitableness and sufficiency, as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of all who trust in him, and is enabled by an appropriating faith to say, "He is mine, and I am is." There are various degrees of this persuasion; it is of a growing nature, and is capable of increase so long as we remain in this world. I call it *assurance*, when it arises from a simple view of the grace and glory of the Savior, independent of our sensible frames and feelings, so as to enable us to answer all objections, from unbelief and Satan, with the Apostle's words, "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died; yes rather, who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Rom. 8:34. This, in my judgment, does not belong to the essence of faith, so that 'B' should be deemed more truly a believer than 'A', but to the establishment of faith. And now that faith is stronger, it has more to grapple with.

I think the characteristic of the state of 'A' is desire, and of 'B' is conflict. Not that B's desires have subsided, or that 'A' was a stranger to conflict; but as there was a sensible eagerness and keenness in A's desires, which, perhaps, is seldom known to be equally strong afterwards, so there are usually trials and exercises in B's experience; something different in their kind and sharper in their measure than what 'A' was exposed to, or indeed had strength to endure. 'A', like Israel, has been delivered from Egypt by great power and a stretched-out arm, has been pursued and terrified by many enemies, has given himself up for lost again and again. He has at last seen his enemies destroyed, and has sang the song of Moses and the Lamb upon the banks of the Red Sea. Then he commences 'B'. Perhaps, like Israel, he thinks his difficulties are at an end, and expects to go on rejoicing until he enters the promised land. But, alas! his difficulties are in a manner but beginning; he has a wilderness before him, of which he is not aware. The Lord is now about to suit his dispensations to humble and to prove him, and to show him what is in his heart, that he may do him good at the latter end, and that all the glory may redound to his own free grace.

Since the Lord hates and abhors sin, and teaches his people whom he loves to hate it likewise, it might seem desirable (and all things are equally easy to him), that at the same time they are delivered from the guilt and reigning power of sin, they should likewise be perfectly freed from the defilement of indwelling sin, and be made fully conformable to him at once. His wisdom has, however, appointed otherwise. But, from the above premises, of God's hatred of sin, and his love to his people, I think we may certainly conclude, that he would not allow sin to remain in them, if he did not purpose to over-rule it, for the fuller manifestation of the glory of his grace and wisdom, and for the making his salvation more precious to their souls.

It is, however, his command, and therefore their duty: yes, further, from the new nature he has given them, it is their desire to watch and strive against sin; and to propose the mortification of the whole body of sin, and the advancement of sanctification in their hearts, as their great and constant aim, to which they are to have a habitual persevering regard. Upon this plan 'B' sets out. The knowledge of our acceptance with God, and of our everlasting security in Christ, has in itself the same tendency upon earth as it will have in heaven, and would, in proportion to the degree of evidence and clearness, produce the same effects, of continual love, joy, peace, gratitude, and praise, if there was nothing to counteract it. But 'B' is not all *spirit*. A depraved nature still cleaves to him; and he has the seeds of every natural corruption yet remaining in his heart. He lives likewise in a world that is full of snares, and occasions, suited to draw forth those corruptions; and he is surrounded by invisible spiritual enemies, the extent of whose power and subtlety he is yet to learn by painful experience. 'B' knows, in general, the nature of his Christian warfare, and sees his right to live upon Jesus for righteousness and strength. He is

willing to endure hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and believes, that, though he may be sore thrust at that he may fall, the Lord will be his stay. He knows, that his heart is "deceitful and desperately wicked;" but he does not, he cannot, know at first, the full meaning of that expression.

Yet it is for the Lord's glory, and will in the end make his grace and love still more precious, that 'B' should find new and mortifying proofs of all evil nature as he goes on, such as he could not once have believed had they been foretold to him, as in the case of Peter, Mark 14:29. And, in effect, the abominations of the heart do not appear in their full strength and aggravation, but in the case of one who, like 'B', has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and rejoiced in his salvation.

The exceeding sinfulness of sin is manifested, not so much by its breaking through the restraint of threatening and commands, as by its being capable of acting against light and against love. Thus it was with Hezekiah. He had been a faithful and zealous servant of the Lord for many years; but I suppose he knew more of God, and of himself, in the time of his sickness, than he had ever done before. The Lord, who had signally defended him from Sennacherib, was pleased likewise to raise him from the borders of the grave by a miracle, and prolonged the time of his life in answer to prayer. It is plain, from the song which he penned upon his recovery, that he was greatly affected with the mercies he had received; yet still there was something in his heart which he knew not, and which it was for the Lord's glory he should be made sensible of, and therefore he was pleased to leave him to himself. It is the only instance in which he is said to have been left to himself, and the only instance in which his conduct is condemned.

I apprehend, that, in the state of 'B', that is, for a season after we have known the Lord, we have usually the most sensible and distressing experience of our evil natures. I do not say, that it is necessary that we should be left to fall into gross outward sin, in order to know what is in our hearts; though I believe many have thus fallen, whose hearts, under a former sense of redeeming love, have been as truly set against sin, as the hearts of others who have been preserved from such outward falls. The Lord makes some of his children examples and warnings to others, as he pleases. Those who are spared, and whose worst deviations are only known to the Lord and themselves, have great reason to be thankful. I am sure I have: the merciful Lord has not allowed me to make any considerable blot in my profession during the time I have been numbered among his people. But I have nothing to boast of herein. It has not been owing to my wisdom, watchfulness, or spirituality, though in the main he has not allowed me to live in the neglect of his appointed means. But I hope to go softly all my days under the remembrance of many things, for which I have as great cause to be abased before him, as if I had been left to sin grievously in the sight of men. Yet, with respect to my acceptance in the Beloved, I know not if I have had a doubt of a quarter of an hour's continuance for many years past. But, oh! the multiplied instances of stupidity, ingratitude, impatience, and rebellion, to which my conscience has been witness! And as every heart knows its own bitterness, I have generally heard the like complaints from others of the Lord's people with whom I have conversed, even from those who have appeared to be eminently gracious and spiritual.

'B' does not meet with these things perhaps at first, nor every day. The Lord appoints occasions and turns in life, which try our spirits. There are particular seasons when temptations are suited to our frames, tempers, and situations; and there are times when he is pleased to withdraw, and to permit Satan's approach, that we may feel how vile we are in ourselves. **We are prone to spiritual pride, to self-dependence, to vain confidence, to creature attachments, and a train of evils.** The Lord often discovers to us one sinful disposition by exposing us to another. He sometimes shows us what he can do for us and in us; and at other times how little we can do, and how unable we are to stand without him.

By a variety of these exercises, through the over-ruling and edifying influences of the Holy Spirit, 'B' is trained up in a growing knowledge of himself and of the Lord. He learns to be more distrustful of his own heart, and to suspect a snare in every step he takes. The dark and disconsolate hours which he has brought upon himself in times past, make him doubly prize the light of God's countenance, and teach him to dread whatever might grieve the Spirit of God, and cause him to withdraw again. The repeated and multiplied pardons which he has received, increase his admiration of, and the sense of his obligations to, the rich sovereign abounding mercy of the covenant. Much has been forgiven him, therefore he loves much, and therefore he knows how to forgive and pity others. He does not call evil good, or good evil; but his own experiences teach him tenderness and forbearance. He exercises a spirit of meekness towards those who are overtaken in a fault; and his attempts to restore such, are according to the pattern of the Lord's dealings with himself.

In a word, B's character, in my judgment, is complete; and he becomes a 'C', when the habitual frame of his heart answers to that passage in the Prophet Eze. 16:63; "That you may remember, and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more (to boast, complain, or censure), because of your shame, when I am pacified towards you for all that you have done, says the Lord God."

### **C; or, The full corn in the ear**

"First the blade, then the ear, after that **the full corn in the ear**". Mark 4:28

Dear Sir,

By way of distinction, I assigned to 'A' the characteristic of **desire**, to 'B' that of **conflict**. I can think of no single word more descriptive of the state of 'C' than **contemplation**. His eminence, in comparison of 'A', does not consist in the sensible warmth and fervency of his affections: in this respect many of the most exemplary believers have looked back with a kind of regret upon the time of their espousals, when, though their judgments were but imperfectly formed, and their views of Gospel truths were very indistinct, they felt a fervor of spirit, the remembrance of which is both humbling and refreshing; and yet they cannot recall the same sensations. Nor is he properly distinguished from 'B' by a consciousness of his acceptance in the Beloved, and an ability of calling God his Father; for this I have supposed 'B' has attained to.

Though, as there is a growth in every grace, 'C', having had his views of the Gospel, and of the Lord's faithfulness and mercy, confirmed by a longer experience, his assurance is of course more stable and more simple, than when he first saw himself safe from all condemnation. Neither has 'C', properly speaking, any more strength or stock of grace inherent in himself than 'B', or even than 'A'. **He is in the same state of absolute dependence, as incapable of performing spiritual acts, or of resisting temptations by his own power, as he was at the first day of his setting out.** Yet in a sense he is much stronger, because he has a more feeling and constant sense of his own weakness. The Lord has been long teaching him this lesson by a train of various dispensations; and through grace he can say, that he has not suffered so many things in vain. *His heart has deceived him so often, that he is now in a good measure weaned from trusting to it; and therefore he does not meet with so many disappointments.* And having found again and again the vanity of all other helps, he is now taught to go to the Lord at once for "grace to help in every time of need." Thus he is strong, not in himself, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

But C's happiness and superiority to 'B' lies chiefly in this, that, by the Lord's blessing on the use of means—such as prayer, reading and hearing of the word, and by a sanctified improvement of what he has seen of the Lord, and of his own heart,



in the course of his experience—*he has attained clearer, deeper, and more comprehensive views of the mystery of redeeming love*; of the glorious excellency of the Lord Jesus, in his person, offices, grace, and faithfulness; of the harmony and glory of all the Divine perfection's manifested in and by him to the church; of the stability, beauty, fullness, and certainty of the Holy Scriptures; and of the heights, depths, lengths, and breadths of the love of God in Christ. Thus, though his sensible feelings may not be so warm as when he was in the state of 'A', his judgment is more solid, his mind more fixed, his thoughts more habitually exercised upon the things within the veil. His great business is to behold the glory of God in Christ; and by beholding, he is changed into the same image, and brings forth in an eminent and uniform manner the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. His contemplation's are not barren speculations, but have a real influence, and enable him to exemplify the Christian character to more advantage, and with more consistence, than can in the present state of things be expected either from 'A' or 'B'. The following particulars may illustrate my meaning.

**I. Humility.** A measure of this grace is to be expected in every true Christian: but it can only appear in proportion to the knowledge they have of Christ and of their own hearts. It is a part of C's daily employment to look back upon the way by which the Lord has led him; and while he reviews the Ebenezers he has set up all along the road, he sees, in almost an equal number, the monuments of his own perverse returns, and how he has in a thousand instances rendered to the Lord, evil for good. Comparing these things together, he can without affectation adopt the Apostle's language, and style himself "less than the least of all saints, and of sinners the chief." 'A' and 'B' know that they ought to be humbled; but 'C' is truly so, and feels the force of that text which I mentioned in my last; Eze. 16:63. Again, as he knows most of himself, so he has seen most of the Lord. The apprehension of infinite Majesty combined with infinite Love, makes him shrink into the dust. From the exercise of this grace he, derives two others, which are exceedingly ornamental, and principal branches of the mind which was in Christ.

The one is **submission to the will of God**. The views he has of his own vileness, unworthiness, and ignorance, and of the Divine sovereignty, wisdom, and love—teach him to be content in every state, and to bear his appointed lot of suffering with resignation, according to the language of David in a time of affliction, "I was silent, and opened not my mouth, because you did it."

The other is, **tenderness of spirit towards his fellow-Christians**. He cannot but judge of their conduct according to the rule of the word. But his own heart, and the knowledge he has acquired of the snares of the world, and the subtlety of Satan, teach him to make all due allowances, and qualify him for admonishing and restoring, in the spirit of meekness, those who have been over taken in a fault. Here 'A' is usually blameable; the warmth of his zeal, not being duly corrected by a sense of his own imperfections, betrays him often into a censorious spirit. But 'C' can bear with 'A' likewise, because he has been so himself, and he will not expect green fruit to be ripe.

**II. Spirituality.** A spiritual taste, and a disposition to account all things as worthless and vanity—in comparison of the knowledge and love of God in Christ—are essential to a true Christian. The world can never be his prevailing choice; 1Jo. 2:13. Yet we are renewed but in part, and are prone to an undue attachment to worldly things. Our spirits cleave to the dust, in defiance to the dictates of our better judgments; and I believe the Lord seldom gives his people a considerable victory over this evil principle, until he has let them feel how deeply it is rooted in their hearts. We may often see people entangled and clogged in this respect, of whose sincerity in the main we cannot justly doubt; especially upon some sudden and unexpected turn in life, which brings them into a situation they have not been accustomed to.

A considerable part of our trials are mercifully appointed to wean us from this worldly propensity; and it is gradually weakened by the Lord's showing us at one time the vanity of the creature, and at another his own excellence and all-sufficiency.

Even 'C' is not perfect in this respect; but he is more sensible of the evil of such attachments, more humbled for them, more watchful against them, and more delivered from them. He still feels a fetter, but he longs to be free. His allowed desires are brought to a point; and he sees nothing worth a serious thought, but communion with God and progress in holiness.

Whatever outward changes 'C' may meet with, he will in general be the same man still. He has learned, with the Apostle, not only to suffer need, but (which is perhaps the harder lesson) how to *abound*. A palace would be a prison to him, without the Lord's presence; and with the Lord's presence, a prison would be a palace. From hence arises a peaceful reliance upon the Lord: he has nothing which he cannot commit into his hands, which he is not habitually aiming to resign to his disposal. Therefore he is not afraid of evil tidings; but when the hearts of others shake like the leaves of a tree, he is fixed, trusting in the Lord, who he believes can and will make good every loss, sweeten every bitter, and appoint all things to work together for his advantage. He sees that the time is short, lives upon the foretastes of glory, and therefore accounts not his life, or any inferior concernment, dear, so that he may finish his course with joy.

**III. A union of heart to the glory and will of God**, is another noble distinction of C's spirit. The glory of God, and the good of his people, are inseparably connected. But of these great ends the first is unspeakably the highest and the most important, and into which everything else will be finally resolved. Now, in proportion as we advance nearer to him, our judgment, aim, and end will be conformable to his, and his glory will have the highest place in our hearts. At first it is not so, or but very imperfectly. Our concern is chiefly about ourselves; nor can it be otherwise. The convinced soul inquires, 'What shall I do to be saved?' The young convert is intent upon sensible comforts; and in the seasons when he sees his interest secure, the prospect of the troubles he may meet with in life makes him often wish for an early death, that he may be at rest, and avoid the heat and burden of the day.

But 'C' has attained to more enlarged views: he has a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which would be importunate if he considered only himself; but his chief desire is, that God may be glorified in him, whether by his life or by his death. He is not his own; nor does he desire to be His own; but, so that the power of Jesus may be manifested in him, he will take pleasure in infirmities, in distresses, in temptations; and, though he longs for heaven, would be content to live as long as Methuselah upon earth, if, by anything he could do or suffer, the will and glory of God might be promoted. And though he loves and adores the Lord for what he has done and suffered for him, delivered him from, and appointed him to; yet he loves and adores him likewise with a more simple and direct love, in which *self* is in a manner forgotten, from the consideration of God's glorious excellence and perfections, as he is in himself. That God in Christ is glorious over all, and blessed forever, is the very joy of his soul; and his heart can frame no higher wish, than that the sovereign, wise, holy will of God may be accomplished in him, and all his creatures. Upon this grand principle his prayers, schemes, and actions, are formed. Thus 'C' is already made like the angels; and, so far as is consistent with the inseparable remnants of a fallen nature, the will of God is regarded by him upon earth as it is by the inhabitants of heaven.

The power of Divine grace in 'C' may be exemplified in a great variety of situations. 'C' may be rich or poor, learned or illiterate, of a lively natural spirit, or of a more slow and phlegmatic constitution. He may have a comparatively smooth, or a

remarkably thorny path in life; he may be a minister or layman. These circumstantial will give some tincture and difference in appearance to the work; but the work itself is the same; and we must, as far as possible, make proper allowances for each, in order to form a right judgment of the life of faith.

The outward expression of grace may be heightened and set off to advantage by many things which are merely natural, such as evenness of temper, good sense, a knowledge of the world, and the like; and it may be darkened by things which are not properly sinful, but unavoidable, such as lowness of spirit, weak abilities, and pressure of temptations, which may have effects that those who have not had experience in the same things cannot properly account for. A double quantity of real grace, if I may so speak, that has a double quantity of hindrances to conflict with, will not be easily observed, unless these hindrances are likewise known and attended to; and a smaller measure of grace may appear great, when its exercise meets with no remarkable obstruction. For these reasons, we can never be competent judges of each other, because we cannot be competently acquainted with the whole complex case.

But our great and merciful High Priest knows the whole: he considers our frame, "remembers that we are but dust;" makes gracious allowances; pities, bears, accepts, and approves, with unerring judgment. The sun, in his daily course, beholds nothing so excellent and honorable upon earth as 'C', though perhaps he may be confined to a cottage, and is little known or noticed by men. But he is the object and residence of Divine love, the charge of angels, and ripening for everlasting glory. Happy 'C'! his toils, sufferings, and exercises, will be soon at an end; soon his desires will be accomplished; and He who has loved him, and redeemed him with his own blood, will receive him to himself, with a "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter you into the joy of your Lord."

If this representation is agreeable to the Scriptures, how greatly are they mistaken, and how much to be pitied, who, while they make profession of the Gospel—seem to have no idea of *the effects it is designed to produce upon the hearts of believers*, but either allow themselves in a worldly spirit and conversation, or indulge their unsanctified tempers, by a fierce contention for names, notions, and parties. May the Lord give to you and to me daily to grow in the experience of that wisdom which "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

# The work of grace

September 3, 1776.

My dear Miss M,

We saw no danger upon the road homeward; but my judgment tells me we are always upon the brink of danger, though we see it not; and that, without the immediate protection and care of Him who preserves the stars in their courses--there could be no traveling safely a few miles, nor even sitting in safety by the fire-side! But with him we are safe in all places and circumstances, until our race is done, and his gracious purposes concerning us in the present life are completely answered. Then he will call us home, that we may see his face, and be with him forever! *It will not much matter, by what messenger he shall be pleased to call us home by.*

While he took care of us abroad, he watched over our concerns at home likewise; so that we found all well upon our return, and met with nothing to grieve us. Many go out and return home no more, and many find distressing things have happened in their absence; but we have to set up our Ebenezer, and to say, *Hitherto he has helped us!* Assist me to praise him. The Lord is leading you in the good old way, in which you may perceive the footsteps of his flock who have gone before you. They had in their day the same difficulties, fears, and troubles as we have; and, through mercy, we partake of the same consolation which supported and refreshed them; and the promises which they trusted and found faithful--are equally sure to us. It is still true--that those who believe shall never be confounded.

If left to ourselves, we would have built upon sand. But he has provided and revealed a sure foundation, removed our natural prejudices against it; and now, though rains, and floods, and storms assault our building, it cannot fall--for it is founded upon a rock--the Lord Jesus Christ!

The suspicious and fears which arise in an awakened mind, proceed, in a good measure, from remaining unbelief; but not wholly so, for there is a jealousy and self-distrust of ourselves, a wariness, owing to a sense of the deceitfulness of our hearts--which is a grace, and a gift of the Lord.

Some people, who have much zeal--but are destitute of this jealous fear--may be compared to a ship which spreads a great deal of sail--but is not properly ballasted, and is therefore in danger of being over set whenever a storm comes. A sincere person has many reasons for distrusting his own judgment; is sensible of the vast importance of the case, and afraid of too hastily concluding in his own favor, and therefore not easily satisfied. However, this fear, though useful, especially to young beginners, is not comfortable. Those who simply wait upon Jesus, are gradually freed from it, in proportion as their knowledge of him, and their experience of his goodness, increases.

He has a time for settling and establishing them in himself--and his time is best. We are hasty, and would be satisfied at once; but his word is, "wait for the Lord's time." **The work of grace** is not like Jonah's gourd, which sprang up and flourished in a night--and as quickly withered; but rather like the oak, which, from a little acorn and a tender plant, advances with an almost imperceptible growth from year to year, until it becomes a broad-spreading and deep-rooted tree, and then it stands for ages. The *Christian oak* shall grow and flourish forever.

When I see any, soon after they appear to be awakened, making a speedy profession of great joy, before they have a due acquaintance with their own hearts--I am in pain for them. I am not sorry to hear them afterwards complain that their joys are gone,

and they are almost at their wit's end; for, without some such check, to make them feel their weakness and dependence, I seldom find them to turn out well; either their fervor insensibly abates, until they become quite cold, and sink into the world again--of which I have seen many instances. Or, if they do not give up all--their walk is uneven, and their spirit has not that savor of *brokenness* and *true humility* which is a chief ornament of our holy profession. If they do not feel the plague of their hearts at first--they find it out afterwards, and too often manifest it to others.

Therefore, though I know the Spirit of the Lord is free, and will not be confined to our rules, and there may be excepted cases; yet, in general, I believe the old proverb, "Soft and fair goes far," will hold good in Christian experience. Let us be thankful for the beginnings of grace, and wait upon our Savior patiently for the increase. And as we have chosen him for our physician--let us commit ourselves to his management, and not prescribe to him what he shall prescribe for us. He knows us and he loves us better than we do ourselves, and will do all things well.

You say, "It never came with power and life to my soul that he died for me." If you mean that you never had any extraordinary sudden manifestation, something like a vision or a voice from heaven, confirming it to you, I can say the same. But I know he died for sinners; I know I am a sinner; I know he invites those who are ready to perish; I am such a one. I know, upon his own invitation, I have committed myself to him; and I know, by the effects, that he has been with me hitherto, otherwise I should have been an apostate long ago! And therefore I know that he died for me; for had he been pleased to damn me (as he justly might have done), he would not have shown me such things as these.

If I must perish, would the Lord  
Have taught my heart to love his Word?  
Would he have given me eyes to see  
My danger and my remedy;  
Revealed his name, and bid me pray--  
Had he resolved to say me *nay*?

I know that I am his child, because he teaches me to say, *Abba, Father*. I know that I am his, because he has enabled me to choose him for my best portion. For such a choice and desire could never have taken place in my heart--if he had not placed it there himself. By nature I was too *blind* to know him, too *proud* to trust him, too *obstinate* to serve him, too *base-minded* to love him. The enmity I was filled with against his government, righteousness, and grace--was too strong to be subdued by any power but his own. The love I bear to him is but a faint and feeble spark--but it is an emanation from himself; he kindled it, and he keeps it alive; and because it is his work, I trust many waters shall not quench it.

# What a Christian *ought* to be

September, 1772

Dear sir,

Weak, unskillful, and unfaithful, as I am in practice—the Lord has been pleased to give me some idea of what a Christian ought to be, **and of what is actually attainable in the present life**, by those whom he enables earnestly to aspire towards the prize of their high calling. They who are versed in mechanics can, from a knowledge of the combined powers of a complicated machine, make an exact calculation of what it is able to perform, and what resistance it can counteract. But who can compute the possible effects of that combination of principles and motives revealed in the Gospel, upon a heart duly impressed with a sense of their importance and glory?

When I was recently at Mr. Cox's Museum, while I was fixing my attention upon some curious movements, imagining that I saw the whole of the artist's design, the person who showed it touched a little spring, and suddenly a thousand new and unexpected motions took place—and the whole piece seemed animated from the top to the bottom. I would have formed but a very imperfect judgment of it—had I seen no more than what I saw at first. I thought this might, in some measure, illustrate the vast difference that is observable among professors, even among those who are, it is to be hoped, sincere.

There are people who appear to have a true knowledge (in part) of the nature of Gospel religion—but seem not to be apprised of its properties in their extent. If they have attained to some hope of their acceptance, if they find at seasons some communion with God in the means of grace, if they are in measure delivered from the prevailing and corrupt customs of the world—they seem to be as satisfied, as if they were possessed of all. These are indeed great things. The profession of too many, whose sincerity, charity would be unwilling to impeach—is *greatly blemished*, notwithstanding their hopes and their occasional comforts—by the breaking forth of unsanctified tempers, and the indulgence of vain hopes, anxious cares, and selfish pursuits.

Far, very far, am I from that unscriptural sentiment of *sinless perfection* in fallen man. To those who have a due sense of the spirituality and ground of the Divine precepts, and of what passes in their own hearts—causes of humiliation and self-abasement on the account of sin will never be lacking. Yet still there is a liberty and privilege attainable by the Gospel, beyond what is ordinarily thought of. Permit me to mention two or three particulars, in which those who have a holy ambition of aspiring to them, shall not be altogether disappointed.

**A delight in the Lord's all-sufficiency, to be satisfied in him as our present and eternal portion.** This, in the sense in which I understand it, is not the effect of a present warm frame—but of a deeply rooted and abiding principle; the habitual exercise of which is to be estimated by the *comparative indifference* with which other things are regarded. The soul thus principled, is not at leisure to take or to seek satisfaction in anything but what has a known subservience to this leading taste. Either the Lord is present—and then he is to be rejoiced in; or else he is absent—and then he is to be sought and waited for. They are to be pitied, who, if they are at some times happy in the Lord, can at other times be happy without him, and rejoice in broken cisterns, when their spirits are at a distance from the Fountain of living waters.

I do not plead for an **absolute indifference to temporal blessings**. God gives us all things richly to enjoy; and a capacity of relishing them, is his gift likewise; but then

the consideration of his love in bestowing all our temporal blessings, should exceedingly enhance the value, and a regard to his will should regulate their use. Nor can they all supply the lack of that which we can only receive immediately from himself. This principle likewise moderates that inordinate *fear* and *sorrow* to which we are liable, upon the prospect or the occurrence of great trials, for which there is a sure support and resource provided in the all-sufficiency of infinite goodness and grace. What a privilege is this—to possess God in all things while we have them—and all things in God when they are taken from us!

**An acquiescence in the Lord's will—founded in a persuasion of his wisdom, holiness, sovereignty, and goodness.** This is one of the greatest privileges and brightest ornaments of our profession. So far as we attain to this—we are secure from disappointment. Our own limited views, and short-sighted purposes and desires, may be, and will be, often over-ruled; but then, our main and leading desire, that the will of the Lord may be done, and must be accomplished. How highly does it befit us, both as *creatures* and as *sinner*s—to submit to the appointments of our Maker! And how necessary is it to our peace!

This great attainment is too often unthought of, and overlooked. We are prone to fix our attention upon the *second causes* and *immediate instruments* of events; forgetting that whatever befalls us, is according to God's purpose, and therefore must be right and seasonable in itself, and shall in the outcome, be productive of good. From hence arise impatience, resentment, and secret repining, which are not only sinful—but tormenting! Whereas, if all things are in his hand; if the very hairs of our head are numbered; if every event, great and small, is under the direction of his providence and purpose; and if he has a wise, holy, and gracious end in view, to which everything that happens is subordinate and subservient—then we have nothing to do—but with patience and humility to follow as he leads, and cheerfully to expect a happy outcome. The path of present duty is marked out; and the concerns of the next and every following hour—are in his hands. How happy are those who can resign all to him, see his hand in every dispensation, and believe that he chooses better for them—than they could possibly choose for themselves!

**A single eye to his glory—as the ultimate scope of all our undertakings.** The Lord can design nothing short of his own glory—nor should we. The constraining love of Christ has a direct and marvelous tendency, in proportion to the measure of faith, to mortify the corrupt principle, SELF, which for a season is the grand spring of our conduct and by which we are too much biased after we know the Lord. But as *grace* prevails, *self* is renounced. We feel that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price; and that it is our duty, our honor, and our happiness, to be the servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To devote soul and body, every talent, power, and faculty, to the service of his cause and will; to let our light shine (in our several situations) to the praise of his grace; to place our highest joy in the contemplation of his adorable perfections; to rejoice even in tribulations and distresses, in reproaches and infirmities—if thereby the power of Christ may rest upon us, and be magnified in us; to be content, yes glad, *to be nothing*—that he may be all in all; to obey him, in opposition to the threats or solicitations of men; to *trust* him, though all outward appearances seem against us; to *rejoice* in him, though we should (as will sooner or later be the case) have nothing else to rejoice in; to live above the world, and to have our hearts in heaven; to be like the angels, finding our own pleasure in performing his—this is the prize, the mark of our high calling, to which we are encouraged with a holy ambition continually to aspire! It is true, we shall still fall short; we shall find that, when we would do good, evil will be present with us. But the attempt is glorious, and shall not be *wholly* in vain. He who gives us thus to *desire*, will enable us to *perform* with growing success, and teach us to profit, even by our mistakes and imperfections.

O blessed man! who thus fears the Lord; who delights in his Word, and derives his principles, motives, maxims, and consolations, from that unfailing source of light and strength. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf is always green, and fruit abundant. The *wisdom* of God shall direct his plans, and inspire his counsels. The *power* of God shall guard him on every side, and prepare his way through every difficulty. He shall see mountains sink into plains—and streams spring up in the dry wilderness. The Lord's enemies will be his enemies; and they may be permitted to fight against him—but they shall not prevail, for the Lord is with him to deliver him. The conduct of such a one, though in a narrow and retired sphere of life, is of more real excellence and importance, than the most splendid actions of kings and conquerors, which fill the annals of history! And if the God whom he serves is pleased to place him in a more public light, his labors and cares will be amply compensated, by the superior opportunities afforded him of manifesting the power and reality of true religion, and promoting the good of mankind.

I hope I may say, that I *desire* to be thus entirely given up to the Lord; I am sure I must say, that what I have written is far from being my *actual experience*. Alas! I might be condemned out of my own mouth, were the Lord strict to mark what is amiss. But, O the comfort! we are not under the *law*—but under *grace*. The *Gospel* is a dispensation for *sinners*, and we have an Advocate with the Father. There is the unshaken ground of hope. A reconciled Father, a prevailing Advocate, a powerful Shepherd, a compassionate Friend, a Savior who is able and willing to save to the uttermost! He knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust; and has opened for us a new and blood-besprinkled way of access to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need.



# Soldiers of Christ

July 13, 1776.

My dear Sir,

The Lord, who mercifully called you out of a state of thoughtless dissipation, and has hitherto been with you—will, I trust, sweeten all your trials, and cause his light to shine upon your paths.

The Lord is all-sufficient. A lively sense of his love, a deep impression of eternity, a heart filled with zeal for his cause, and a thirst for the good of souls—will, I hope, enable you to make a cheerful sacrifice of whatever has no necessary connection with your peace and his service. And you may rest assured, that whenever He, who loves you better than you do yourself, sees it best for you upon the whole to change your condition—he will bring it about. He will point out the person, prepare the means, and secure the success, by his providence, and the power he has over every heart. And you shall see that all previous difficulties were either *gracious preventions*, which he threw in the way—to prevent your taking a wrong step; or temporary bars, which, by his removing them afterwards, should give you opportunity of more clearly perceiving his care and interposition in your favor. In the mean time, remember your high calling. You are a minister and ambassador of Christ—you are entrusted with the most honorable and important employment that can engage and animate the heart of man! 1Ti. 4:15.

Filled and fired with a constraining sense of the love of Jesus and the worth of souls, impressed with an ardor to carry war into Satan's kingdom, to storm his strongholds, and rescue his captives; you will have little leisure to think of anything else.

How does the *love of glory* stimulate the soldier, make him forget and forego a thousand personal tenderness, and prompt him to cross oceans, to traverse deserts, to scale mountains, and plunge into the greatest hardships and the thickest dangers! They do it for a corruptible crown—a puff of breath, an empty fame; their highest prospect is the applause and favor of their prince.

We likewise are **soldiers**—we have a Prince and Captain who deserves our all. Those who know him, and have hearts to conceive of his excellence, and to feel their obligations to him, cannot, indeed, seek their own glory; but his glory is dearer to them than a thousand lives. They owe him their souls, for he redeemed them with blood, his own blood; and by his grace he subdued and pardoned them when they were rebels, and in arms against him! Therefore they are not their own; they would not desire to be their own. When his standard is raised, when his enemies are in motion, when his people are to be rescued, they go forth, clothed with his panoply; they fight under his eye, they are sure of his support, and he shows them the conqueror's crown. Oh, when they think of that "Well done, good servant" with which he has promised to welcome them home when the campaign is over, hard things seem easy, and bitter things seem sweet. They count nothing, not even their own lives, dear, so that they may finish their course with joy. May the Lord make us thus minded; give us a hearty concern for his business; and he has engaged to take care of ours; and nothing that can conduce to our real comfort and usefulness shall be withheld.

# A visitor from heaven!

August, 1775

Dear sir,

I have no apt preface or introduction at hand, and as I have made it almost a rule not to study for what I would write to you, I therefore beg permission to begin abruptly.

It is the future promised privilege of believers in Jesus, that they *shall* be as the angels; and there is a sense in which we should endeavor to be as the angels *now*. This is intimated to us where we are taught to pray, "May Your will be done on *earth*—as it is in *heaven*." I have sometimes amused myself with supposing that an angel should be appointed to reside awhile upon earth in a human body; not in sinful flesh like ours—but in a body free from infirmity, and still preserving an unabated sense of his own happiness in the favor of God, and of his unspeakable obligation to his goodness. And then I have tried to judge, as well as I could, how such an angel would conduct himself in such a situation. I know not that I ever enlarged upon the thought, either in preaching or writing. Permit me to follow it a little in this paper.

Were I acquainted with this heavenly visitant, I am willing to hope I should greatly reverence him; and, if permitted, be glad, in some cases, to consult him. In some—but not in all; for I think my *fear* would be equal to my *love*. Methinks I could never venture to open my heart freely to him, and unfold to him my numberless complaints and infirmities; for, as he could have no experience of the like things himself, I would suppose he would not know how fully to pity me, indeed, hardly how to bear with me—if I told him all. Alas! what a preposterous, strange, vile creature should I appear to an angel, if he knew me as I am!

It is well for me that Jesus was made lower than the angels, and that the human nature he assumed was not distinct from the common nature of mankind, though secured from the common depravity; and because he submitted to be under the law in our name and stead, though he was free from sin himself—yet, sin and its consequences being (for our sakes) charged upon him, he acquired, in the days of his humiliation, an *experimental sympathy* with his poor people. He knows the effects of sin and temptation upon us, by that knowledge whereby he knows all things; but he knows them likewise in a way more suitable for our comfort and relief, by the sufferings and exercises he passed through for us! Hence arises our encouragement. We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities—but was in all points tempted even as we are.

When I add to this, the consideration of his power, promises, and grace, and that he is exalted on purpose to pity, relieve, and save—I gather courage. With him I dare be free; and am not sorry—but glad, that *he knows me perfectly*, that not a thought of my heart is hidden from him. For, without this infinite and exact knowledge of my *disease*—how could he effectually administer to my *cure*?

Where am I rambling? I seem to have lost sight of *the angel* already! I am now coming back, that, if he cannot effectually *pity* me, he may at least *animate* and *teach* me.

In the first place, I take it for granted this angel would think himself a stranger and pilgrim upon earth. He would not forget that his home was in heaven. Surely he would look upon all the *bustle of human* life (farther than the design of his mission might connect him with it) with more indifference than we look upon the *play of little children*, or the *amusements of idiots and lunatics*, which give us an uneasiness, rather than excite a desire of joining in them. He would judge of

everything around him, by the reference and tendency it had to promote the will of him who sent him; and the most splendid appearances, considered in any other view, would make no impression upon him.

Consequently, as to his own concernment, all his aim and desire would be to fulfill the will of God. All situations would be alike to him; whether he was commanded, as in the case of Sennacherib, to destroy a mighty army with a stroke; or, as in the case of Hagar, to attend upon a woman, as a servant. Both services would be to him equally honorable and important, because he was in both equally pleasing his Lord, which would be his element and his joy, whether he was appointed to guide the reins of empire—or to sweep the streets!

Again—the angel would doubtless exhibit a striking example of benevolence; for, being free from selfish bias, filled with a sense of the love of God, and a knowledge of his adorable perfections, his whole heart and soul and strength would be engaged and exerted, both from duty and inclination, to relieve the miseries and advance the happiness of all around him. In this, he would follow the pattern of Him who does good to all, commanding his sun to rise and his rain to fall upon the just and the unjust; though, from the same pattern, he would show an especial regard to the household of faith. An angel would take but little part in the controversies, contentions, and broils, which might happen in the time of his sojourning here—but would be a friend to all, so far as consistent with the general good.

The will and glory of God being the angel's great purpose, and having a more lively sense of the realities of an unseen world than we can at present conceive—he would certainly, in the first and chief place, have the success and spread of the glorious Gospel at heart. Angels, though not redeemed with blood—yet feel themselves nearly concerned in the work of redemption. They admire its mysteries. We may suppose them well informed in the works of creation and providence; but (unlike too many men, who are satisfied with the knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, or history) they search and pry into the *counsels of redeeming love*, rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, and think themselves well employed to be ministering spirits, to minister to the heirs of salvation. It would therefore be his chief delight to espouse and promote their cause, and to employ all his talents and influence in spreading the savor and knowledge of the name of Jesus—which is the only and effectual means, of bringing sinners out of bondage and darkness—into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Lastly—though his zeal for the glory of his Lord would make him willing to continue here until he had finished the work given him to do—he would, I am persuaded, look forward with desire to the appointed moment of his recall back to heaven—that he might be freed from beholding and mixing with the *sin* and *vanity* of those who know not God, render his account with joy, and be welcomed to heaven with a "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Surely he would long for this, as a laborer for the setting sun; and would not form any connection with the things of time, which should prompt him to wish his removal protracted for a single hour beyond the period of his prescribed service.

Alas! why am not I more like an angel? My views, in my better judgment, are the same. My motives and obligations are even stronger—an angel is not so deeply indebted to the grace of God, as a believing sinner, who was once upon the brink of destruction, has been redeemed with blood, and might justly have been, before now, shut up with the powers of darkness without hope! Yet the merest trifles are sufficient to debase my views, damp my activity, and impede my endeavors in the Lord's service, though I profess to have no other end or desire which can make a continuance in life worthy my wish!

## Will the sins of believers be publicly declared at the great day?

A letter to a friend, on the question, whether the sins of believers shall be publicly declared at the great day? Or, how are we to understand the apostle's assertion, "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one shall receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad?" 2Co. 5:10. compared with Rom. 14:12.

My dear Sir,

My heart congratulates you. What changes and events many in younger life may be reserved to see, who can tell? but your pilgrimage is nearly finished. You stand upon the river's brink, with the city full in view, waiting and wishing for the appointed hour: you need not be anxious concerning your passage; for every circumstance attending it is already adjusted by Infinite Wisdom and Love, and the King himself will be ready to receive you. While you continue here, I am glad to hear from you, and would be glad to contribute in any way or degree to your satisfaction, or even to show my willingness, if I can do no more. I can propose little more than the latter, by offering my thoughts on the subject you propose from 2Co. 5:10, and the apparent difficulty of understanding that passage in full harmony with the many texts which seem expressly to assert, that the sins of believers are so forgiven as to be remembered no more.

There is doubtless (as you observe) a perfect consistence in every part of the word of God: *the difficulties we meet with are wholly owing to the narrowness of our faculties, and the ignorance which in some degree is inseparable from our present state of imperfection.* And we may, in general, rest satisfied with the thought that there is a bright moment approaching, when the veil shall be wholly taken away. **It is the part of faith to rest upon the plain declarations of Scripture, without indulging a blamable curiosity of knowing more than is clearly revealed;** yet while we humbly depend upon Divine teaching, it is right to aim at as enlarged a sense of what is revealed as we can attain to. Every acquisition of this kind is more valuable than gold, especially respecting those points which have an immediate tendency to comfort and support us under the view of an approaching dissolution: the question you have proposed is undoubtedly of this nature.

May the Lord direct my thoughts and pen that I may not "darken counsel by words without knowledge!" I have been looking over the passage you refer to in Dr. Ridgley, and think I might be well excused from saying anything further on the subject, as he has briefly and fully stated all the arguments that have occurred to me on either side of the question, and closes with a proper caution not to be peremptory in determining, lest by attempting to be wise above what is written, I should betray my own folly. Yet as you desire to have my thoughts, I must say something. I wish I may not give you reason to think that this caution has been lost upon me.

I think all the great truths in which we are concerned, are clearly and expressly laid down, not only in one, but in many places of Scripture; but it sometimes happens, that here and there we meet with a text, which, in the first and obvious sound of the words, seems to speak differently from what is asserted more largely elsewhere; which texts, singly taken, afford some men their only ground for the hypothesis they maintain. Thus the Arians lay a great stress on Joh. 14:28, and the Arminians on Jam. 2:24, &c. But their true interpretation is to be sought according to the analogy of faith. They are capable of a sense agreeable to the others, though the others are not intelligible in the sense they would fix upon these. In like manner I would say, whatever may be the precise meaning of 2Co. 5:10, we are sure it cannot be designed to weaken what we are taught, in almost every page, of the free, absolute, and unalterable nature of a believer's justification; the benefit of which, as to the

forgiveness of sin, is signified by the phrases of "blotting out," "not remembering," "casting behind the back," and "into the depths of the sea." The sins of a believer are so effectually removed, that, even when they are sought for, they cannot be found. For Jesus has borne them away: believers are complete in him, and clothed in his righteousness. They shall stand before God without spot or wrinkle. Who shall lay anything to their charge?

But it is probable that these expressions, chiefly, if not entirely, respect the guilt, imputation, and deserved consequences of sin. None can suppose that the Lord will or can forget the sins of his people, or that they can be ever hidden from his all-comprehending view. Neither can I think they themselves will forget them. Their song is founded upon a recollection of their sins and their circumstances in this life, Rev. 5:9; and their love, and consequently their happiness, seems inseparably connected with the consciousness of what they were, and what they had done. Luk. 7:47. And I think those are the sweetest moments in this life, when we have the clearest sense of our own sins, provided the sense of our acceptance in the Beloved is proportionally clear, and we feel the consolations of his love, notwithstanding all our transgressions. When we arrive in glory, unbelief and fear will cease forever: our nearness to God, and communion with him, will be unspeakably beyond what we can now conceive. Therefore the remembrance of our sins will be no abatement of our bliss, but rather the contrary. When Pharaoh and his army were alive, and pursuing them, the Israelites were terrified: but afterwards, when they saw their enemies dead upon the shore, their joy and triumph were not abated, but heightened by the consideration of their number.

With respect to our sins being made known to others, I acknowledge with you, that I could not now bear to have any of my fellow-creatures made acquainted with what passes in my heart for a single day; but I apprehend it is a part and a proof of my present depravity, that I feel myself disposed to pay so great a regard to the judgment of men, while I am so little affected with what I am in the sight of the pure and holy God. But I believe that *hereafter, when self shall be entirely rooted out, and my will perfectly united to the Divine will, I would feel no reluctance, supposing it for the manifestation of his glorious grace—that men, angels, and devils, should know the very worst of me.* Whether it will be so or no, I dare not determine.

Perhaps the difficulty chiefly lies in the necessity of our being at present taught heavenly things, by earthly things. In the descriptions we have of the great day, allusion is made to what is most solemn in human transactions. The ideas of the judgment-seat, the great trumpet, of the books being opened, and the pleadings, Mat. 25:37-44, seem to be borrowed from the customs of men, to help our weak conceptions, rather than justly and fully to describe what will be the real process. Now, when we attempt to look into the unseen world, we carry our ideas of time and place, and sensible objects, along with us; and we cannot divest ourselves of them, or provide ourselves with better: yet perhaps they have as little relation to the objects we aim at, as the ideas which a man born blind acquires from what he hears and feels have to the true nature of light and colors. Mr. Locke mentions one, who, after much thought and conversation, supposed he had got a tolerable notion of scarlet, and that it was something nearly resembling the sound of a trumpet. Perhaps this is no improper emblem of the utmost we call attain to, when we are endeavoring to realize the solemnities of the judgment-day. What we mean by memory and reasoning, may possibly have no place in the world of spirits. We guess at something more suitable, perhaps, when we use the term intuition. But I apprehend we must die before we can fully understand what it signifies: *perhaps thoughts may be as intelligible there, as words are here.*

In a word, my dear sir, if I have not given you satisfaction (I am sure I have not satisfied myself), accept my apology in the words of a much wiser, and an inspired

man: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it."  
Before long we shall know: in the mean while our cause is in sure hands; we have a Shepherd who will guide us below, an Advocate who will receive and present us before the Throne above. I trust we meet daily before the Throne of Grace: hereafter we shall meet in glory.

# Our common mercies

April, 1773

Dear sir,

For the past five or six weeks—I have been a good deal sickly. The ground of my illness was a cold, attended with a slight fever, and for some time with a cough, which made me feel some inconvenience in preaching. This was followed by a deafness, so great as to cut me off from conversation; for I could not hear the sound of a voice, unless it was spoken loud in my ear. But the Lord has mercifully removed the fever and cough, opened my ears, and I am now nearly as well as usual. I had cause to be *thankful*, especially for two things, under this dispensation:

First, that I was enabled, though sometimes with a little difficulty, to go on with my public work. It is a singular favor I have to acknowledge, that for the space of almost nine years, since I have been in the ministry, our Sunday and weekly services have not been once suspended; whereas I have seen many of the Lord's servants laid aside for a considerable space, within that time. My other great mercy was, that the Lord was pleased to preserve me in a peaceful, resigned frame; so that when I was deaf, and could not be certain that I should recover my hearing any more—I was in general as cheerful and easy as at other times. This was the effect of his goodness—for though I know enough of his sovereignty, wisdom, and faithfulness, of his right to do what he pleases, and the certainty that he does all things well—to furnish me with arguments enough to prove that *submission to his will* is our absolute duty—yet I am sensible, that when the trial actually comes, notwithstanding all the advice I may have offered to others—that I would myself toss like a wild bull in a net; rebel and repine; forget that I am a sinner, and that God is sovereign! This, I say, would always and invariably be the case—unless he was graciously pleased to fulfill his Word, that *strength* shall be given to me, according to needs of the day.

I hope my *deafness* has been instructive to me. The exercise of our *senses* is so *easily* and *constantly* performed, that it seems a thing of a matter of course; but I was then reminded how precarious the tenure is, by which we hold those blessings which seem most our own, and which are most immediately necessary to the comfortable enjoyment of life. Outward senses, mental faculties, health of body, and peace of mind, are extremely valuable; but the continuance of them for a single moment depends upon him who—if he opens none can shut, and when he shuts none can open. A single moment is more than sufficient to deprive us of what we hold most dear, or to prevent us from deriving the least comfort from it if it is not taken away.

I am not presuming to give you information; but only mentioning the thoughts which were much upon my mind while I was incapable of conversation. These are indeed plain and obvious truths, which I have long acknowledged as indisputable; but I have reason to be thankful when the Lord impresses them with fresh power upon my heart, even though he sees fit to do it by the medium of *afflictions*. I have seen of late, something of the weight and importance of that admonition, "This is what the Lord says—Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches—but let him who boasts boast about this—that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight." Jeremiah 9:23-24. This is a passage which, though addressed to the wise, the mighty, and the rich—is of universal application. For SELF, unless corrected and mortified by grace—will find something whereof to boast, in the lowest characters and situations.

And indeed, when things come to be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, the *lunatics in Bedlam*, some of whom boast in their *straw* or their *chains*, as marks of splendor or ensigns of royalty—have as much reason on their side, as any people upon earth who boast in themselves. This alone is the proper ground of glory and joy—a true knowledge of the true God. Then all is safe at present, and all will be happy forever. Then, whatever changes may affect our temporal concerns—our best interests and hopes are secured beyond the reach of change; and whatever we may lose or suffer during this little span of time—will be abundantly compensated in that glorious state of eternity which is just at hand!



# 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.

# I was once blind, but now I see

Dear Sir,

The question, "**What is the discriminating characteristic nature of a work of grace upon the soul?**" has been upon my mind; if I am able to give you satisfaction concerning it, I shall think my time well employed.

The reason why men in a natural state are utterly ignorant of spiritual truths is, that they are wholly destitute of a faculty suited to their perception. A remarkable instance we have in the absurd construction which Nicodemus put upon what our Lord had spoken to him concerning the new birth. And in the supernatural communication of this spiritual faculty, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, I apprehend the inimitable and abiding criterion, which is the subject of our inquiry, does primarily consist. Those passages of Scripture wherein the Gospel truth is compared to light, lead to a familiar illustration of my meaning. Men by nature are stark blind with respect to this light; by grace, the eyes of the understanding are opened.

Among a number of blind men, some may be more ingenious and of better capacity than others. They may be better qualified for such studies and employment's which do not require eye-sight than many who can see, and may attain to considerable skill in them; but with respect to the true nature of light and colors, they are all exactly upon a level. A man born blind, if ingenious and inquisitive, may learn to talk about the light, the sun, or the rainbow, in terms borrowed from those who have seen them; but it is impossible that he can have a just idea of either; and whatever hearsay knowledge he may have acquired, he can hardly talk much upon these subjects without betraying his real ignorance. The case of one blind person has been often quoted. He believed, that, after much inquiry and reflection, he had at last found out what scarlet was; and being asked to explain himself, "I think," says he, "scarlet is something like the sound of a trumpet." This man had about the same knowledge of natural light as Nicodemus had of spiritual. Nor can all the learning or study in the world, enable any person to form a suitable judgment of divine truth, until the eyes of his mind are opened, and then he will perceive it at once. Indeed, this comparison is well suited to show the entire difference between nature and grace, and to explain the ground of that enmity and scorn which fills the hearts of blinded sinners, against those who profess to have been enlightened by the Spirit of God.

But if we could suppose it possible, that there was a whole nation of blind men, and one or two people should go among them, and profess that they could see, while they could not offer them such a proof of their assertion as they were capable of receiving, nor even explain, to their satisfaction, what they meant by *sight*; what may we imagine would be the consequence? I think there is little doubt but these innovators would experience much the same treatment as the believers of Jesus often meet with from a blind world. The blind people would certainly hate and despise them for presuming to pretend to what they had not. They would try to dispute them out of their senses, and bring many arguments to prove that there could be no such thing as either light or sight. They would say, as many say now, 'How is it, if these things are so, that we should know nothing of them?' Yes, I think it probable they would rise against them, as deceivers and enthusiasts, and disturbers of the public peace, and say, "Away with such fellows from the earth; it is not fit that they should live!" But if we should suppose further, that during the heat of the contest some of these blind men should have their eyes suddenly opened, the dispute as to them would be at an end in a minute; they would confess their former ignorance and obstinacy, confirm the testimony of those whom they had before

despised, and of course share in the same treatment from their blind brethren, perhaps be treated still worse, as apostates from the opinion of the public.

If this illustration is justly applicable to our subject, it may lead us to several observations, or inferences, which have a tendency to confirm what we are elsewhere expressly taught by the word of God.

In the first place, it shows, that *regeneration*, or that great change without which a man cannot see the kingdom of God, *is the effect of Almighty power*. Neither education, endeavors, nor arguments, can open the eyes of the blind. It is God alone, who at first caused light to shine out of darkness, who can shine into our hearts, "to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." People may attain some natural ideas of spiritual truths by reading books, or hearing sermons, and may thereby become wise in their own conceits; they may learn to imitate the language of an experienced Christian; but they know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm, and are as distant from the true meaning of the terms, as a blind man who pronounces the words blue or red, is from the ideas which those words raise in the mind of a person who can distinguish colors by his sight.

And from hence we may infer the *sovereignty*, as well as the *efficacy* of grace; since it is evident, not only that the objective light, the word of God, is not afforded universally to all men; but that those who enjoy the same outward means have not all the same perceptions. There are many who stumble in the noon-day, not for lack of light, but for lack of eyes; and those who now see, were once blind even as others, and had neither power nor will to enlighten their own minds. It is a mercy, however, when people are so far sensible of their own blindness, as to be willing to wait for the manifestation of the Lord's power, in the ordinances of his own appointment. He came into the world, and he sends forth His Gospel, that those who see not may see; and when there is a desire raised in the heart for spiritual sight, it shall in his due time be answered.

From hence likewise we may observe the proper use and value of the preaching of the Gospel, which is the great instrument by which the Holy Spirit opens the blind eyes. Like the rod of Moses, it owes all its efficacy to the appointment and promise of God. Ministers cannot be too earnest in the discharge of their office; it behooves them to use all diligence to find out acceptable words, and to proclaim the whole counsel of God. *Yet when they have done all, they have done nothing, unless their word is accompanied to the heart by the power and demonstration of the Spirit*. Without this blessing, an apostle might labor in vain: but it shall be in a measure afforded to all who preach the truth in love, in simplicity, and in all humble dependence upon him who alone can give success. This in a great measure puts all faithful ministers on a level, notwithstanding any seeming disparity in gifts and abilities. Those who have a lively and pathetic talent, may engage the ear, and raise the natural passions of their hearers; *but they cannot reach the heart*. The blessing may be rather expected to attend the humble, than the voluble speaker.

Farther: we may remark, that there is a difference in kind between the highest attainments of *nature*, and the effects of *grace* in the lowest degree. Many are convinced, who are not truly enlightened; are afraid of the consequences of sin, though they never saw its evil; have a seeming desire of salvation, which is not founded upon a truly spiritual discovery of their own wretchedness, and the excellency of Jesus. These may, for a season, hear the word with joy, and walk in the way of professors; but we need not be surprised if they do not hold out—for they have no root. Though many such fall, the foundation of God still stands sure. We may confidently affirm, upon the warrant of Scripture, that those who, having for a while escaped the pollutions of the world, are again habitually entangled in them; or who, having been distressed upon the account of sin, can find relief in a self-righteous course, and stop short of Christ, "who is end of the law for

righteousness to everyone that believes"—we may affirm, that these, whatever profession they may have made, were never capable of perceiving the beauty and glory of the Gospel salvation.

On the other hand, though, where the eyes are divinely enlightened, the soul's first views of itself and of the Gospel may be confused and indistinct, like him who saw men as it were trees walking; yet this light is like the dawn, which, though weak and faint at its first appearance, shines more and more unto the perfect day. It is the work of God; and his work is perfect in kind, though progressive in the manner. He will not despise or forsake the day of small things. When he thus begins, he will make an end; and such people, however feeble, poor, and worthless, in their own apprehensions, if they have obtained a glimpse of the Redeemer's glory, as he is made unto wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—so that his name is precious, and the desire of their hearts is towards him—have good reason to hope and believe, as the wife of Manoah did in a similar case, that if the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have showed them such things as these.

Once more: The spiritual sight and faculty is that which may be principally considered as permanent in a believer. He has no stock of grace, or comfort, or strength, in himself. He needs continual supplies; and if the Lord withdraws from him, he is as weak and unskillful after he has been long engaged in the Christian warfare, as he was when he first entered upon it. The eye is of little present use in the dark; for it cannot see without light. But the return of light is no advantage to a blind man. A believer may be much in the dark; but his spiritual sight remains. Though the exercise of grace may be low, he knows himself, he knows the Lord, he knows the way of access to a throne of grace. His frames and feelings may alter; but he has received such a knowledge of the person and offices, the power and grace, of Jesus the Savior, as cannot be taken from him; and he could withstand even an angel that should preach another gospel, because he has seen the Lord. The length of this paper constrains me to break off. May the Lord increase his light in your heart.

# O for a warmer heart

May 19, 1775

My dear Sir,

I hope you will experience the Lord present with you—at all times and in all places. When it is so, we are at home everywhere; when it is otherwise, home is a prison, and abroad a wilderness. I know what I ought to desire, and what I do desire. I point him out to others as the all in all; I esteem him as such in my own judgment; but, alas! my experience abounds with complaints. He is my sun; but clouds, and sometimes walls, intercept him from my view. He is my strength; yet I am prone to lean upon broken reeds. He is my friend; but on my part there is such coldness and ingratitude as no other friend could bear with! But still he is gracious, and shames me with his repeated multiplied goodness to me. **O for a warmer heart**, a more simple dependence, a more active zeal, a more sensible deliverance from the effects of this body of sin and death!

He helps me in my endeavors to keep the vineyards of others; but, alas! my own vineyard does not seem to flourish as some do around me! However, though I cannot say I labor more abundantly than they all, I have reason to say, with thankfulness, "By the grace of God, I am what I am!" My poor story would soon be much worse, did not he support, restrain, and watch over me every minute! Let me entreat your praises and prayers, on the behalf of me and mine; and may the Lord bless you and yours with an increase in every good.