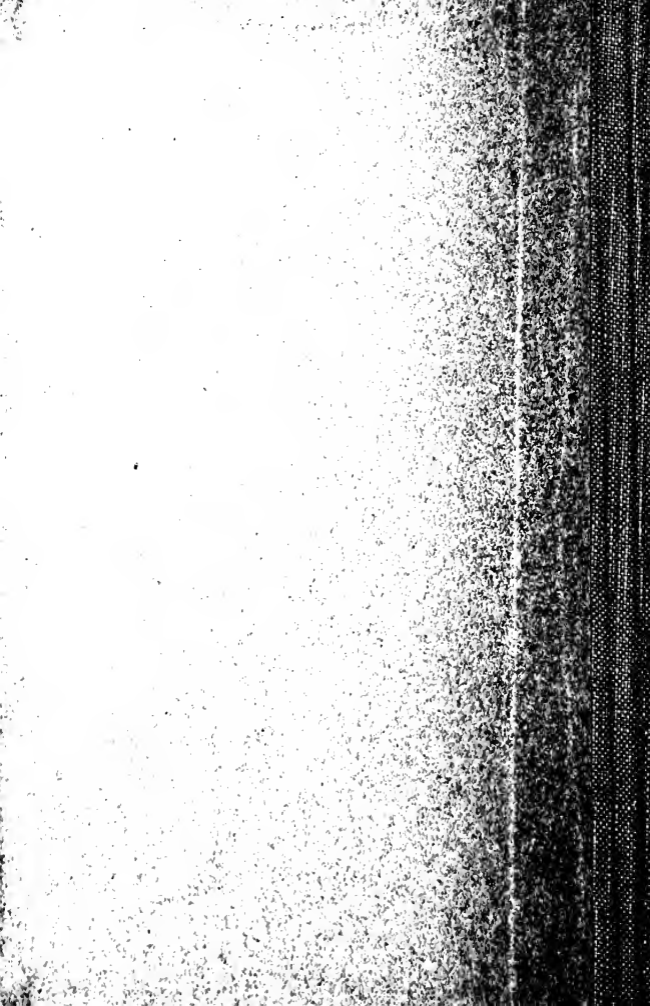


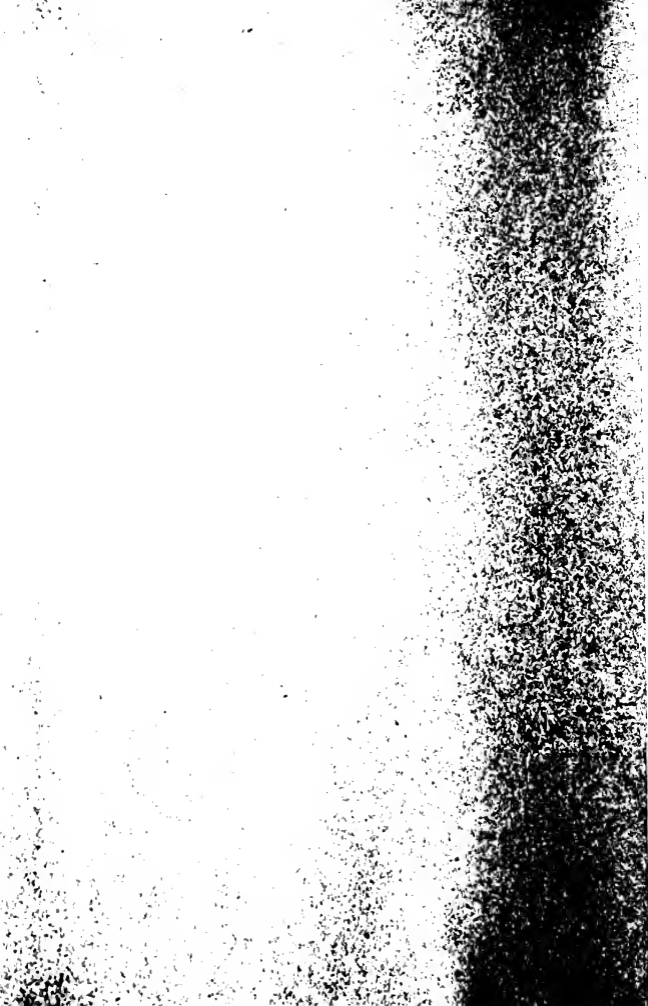
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*Mary, G* THE *W. Kayle*  
*Presented*  
**TOUCHSTONE OF SINCERITY,**

OR

**TRIAL**

OF

**True and False Religion.**

---

BY THE REV. JOHN FLAVEL

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WRITTEN ANEW FROM THE ORIGINAL

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# CONTENTS.

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Chap.	Page.
1. Elucidation of the Text, . . . . .	5
2. Showing that many professors of religion are under great and dangerous mistakes in regard to their character, . . . . .	10
Proofs of this position, . . . . .	12
Causes of their delusion, . . . . .	19
Improvement of this topic, . . . . .	23
3. Showing that holiness is exceedingly valuable, and greatly enriches its possessor, . . . . .	29
Improvement and application, . . . . .	32
4. Showing what may be considered true holiness, . . . . .	35
Trial of men's hearts by prosperity, . . . . .	39
5. Trial by adversity, . . . . .	44
Effects of adversity upon sinners, . . . . .	46
Effects of adversity upon Christians, . . . . .	47
6. Trial by indwelling sin, . . . . .	49
Why sinners may abstain from it, . . . . .	50
Why Christians do abstain from sin, . . . . .	51
7. Trial by the manner in which men perform the duties of religion, . . . . .	63

Chap.	Page
8. Trial by sufferings on account of religion, . . .	70
True Christians are thus manifested, . . .	72
Advantages of holiness under them, . . .	74
9. Exhibiting the ends for which God appoints trials of the graces of his people, . . . . .	75
10. Showing that such only is true holiness as will bear these trials, . . . . .	79
11. Containing various inferences from the subject, and some persuasions to self-examination, . . .	84
12. Proposing various helps for discovering sincerity and detecting hypocrisy, . . . . .	89
Advice to the reader, . . . . .	94

# TOUCHSTONE.



Rev. 3 : 17, 18.

“ Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked : I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ;” &c.

## CHAPTER I.

### *Elucidation of the Text.*

THE members of the Laodicean church had a name to live, but were dead. In regard to their spiritual state, they were emphatically denominated *lukewarm*. They had drawn around them the form of religion, but never heartily engaged in the practice of its duties ; they were strangers to its transforming efficacy, its living influence, and heavenly consolations. To this lifeless indifference the Lord Jesus expressed his aversion : “ I would that thou wert cold or hot,” &c. The word *cold*, here, denotes the moral state of those who are wholly alienated from religion ; the term *hot*, relates to the pious tem-

per of those who fervently love Christ and his institutions; the *lukewarm* are such as are in reality too destitute of religion to be called spiritual, and yet, externally, have too much the appearance of it to be esteemed carnal. The form of religion they affect as an honor, or a safeguard; the power of it they imagine would be burdensome: they choose not to appear openly on the side of error and impiety, but are more unwilling to live conformably to their profession; their policy is such that they venture little, and such is their folly, that they lose all.

In the text the Laodiceans are accused of being in this deplorable state, and a remedy for their spiritual maladies is pointed out.

I. Their moral disease is exposed in its symptoms, its character, and its aggravations.

1. Its *symptoms* are formality, indecision, listless stupidity, lukewarmness; with all the various traits of those professors of religion who love supremely their temporal interests and private happiness.

2. Its *character* is thus noted: "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." All these epithets relate to the unsoundness of their foundation. The two first, "*wretched* and *miserable*," are general, describing their condition to be lamentable, if not hopeless; the three last, "*poor*, *blind*, *naked*," are more particular, referring to those

great defects in the foundation upon which they were building, which rendered their state so pitiable and dangerous. Thou art "*poor*"—devoid of righteousness and true holiness before God. These are the true riches, the riches of Christians: and he that does not possess them, is poor and miserable, how large soever be his mental gifts or earthly treasures. Thou art "*blind*"—without divine illumination, void of spiritual light; and so neither knowing the disease nor the remedy; the evil of sin, or the necessity of Christ. Thou art "*naked*"—in a shameful, defenceless, and exposed condition; without the garments of salvation, the robe of righteousness, and shield of faith.

3. The *aggravations* of this deadly Laodicean disease are thus stated: "Thou sayest. I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not," &c. Alas, to what absurdity and impiety does spiritual delusion lead! To be destitute of holiness, and without Christ, were sufficiently awful; but, while in this state, to boast of spiritual riches, is most miserable. To have the very symptoms of death, and yet confidently protest that we are healthy and safe, is lamentable indeed!

II. A REMEDY is prescribed: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest

be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed ; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see."

1. Let us consider *what* is here recommended. These metaphors represent the most superb and valuable things. *Gold tried in the fire*—true holiness, Christian graces that have been tried and proved. *White raiment*—the righteousness of the saints. *Eye-salve*—the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

2. *Whence* may these blessings be obtained ? Buy of *me*, saith Christ. Ordinances, ministers, angels, cannot communicate them to you. Christ, the repository of all graces, alone can confer them.

3. *How* are they to be acquired ? Not by purchase, as those pretend who build the notion of merit on the words *buy of me*. The exigency of the case destroys this conceit ; for what can they who are poor, and wretched, and miserable, and in want of all things, offer in return for these divine riches ? Doubtless *to buy*, as the phrase is used here, is cordially to receive, in the way of his own appointment, what Christ offers to bestow. Thus it is elsewhere written : " He that hath no money, let him come and buy wine and milk, without money, and without price."

In view of what has been said, three observations offer themselves to our consideration.



1. That many professors of religion are under very great and dangerous mistakes in regard to their character.

2. That true holiness is exceedingly valuable, and greatly enriches the soul.

3. That we may safely account that only to be true holiness which will endure all the tests appointed for its examination.

The first observation naturally arises from the scope of the text, which is to awaken and convince unsound professors.

The second is suggested by the use which the Holy Ghost makes of the richest things in nature, to represent the unspeakable worth of Christian graces.

The third is derived from the very significant metaphor of gold tried in the fire; by which I understand a real work of grace, manifesting and proving itself to be such during the closest inspection, or under the severest trial. For whatever puts the reality of one's holiness to the proof, whatever scrutinizes and tries it, is to him what fire is to gold. Hence we read in Scripture: "Thou hast tried us as silver is tried." Again: "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried."

**CHAPTER II.**

*Showing that many professors of religion are under very great and dangerous mistakes in regard to their character.*

**SECTION I.**

All flattery, and especially self-flattery, is criminal and injurious; but self-flattery, in regard to the concerns of salvation, is to the last degree dangerous and destructive. To persuade ourselves, or endeavor to persuade others, that we possess goodness of which we are in reality destitute, is shameful and ruinous dissimulation. But of this, Laodiceans, and self-deceivers in every age, are guilty.

My present design is not to shake the well-founded hopes of any man, or to excite unreasonable apprehensions, but to discover the radical and fatal defects in the basis of many men's expectations of future happiness. Men must judge of their religion by examining its foundation; if that fail, the superstructure is perishable and worthless.

There is a laudable spirit of caution cherished by saints, which makes them sensible to the danger of self-deception, and renders them watchful and circumspect; there is also a culpable anxiety and fear, tending only to gloom and despondency, to which

they sometimes give way: by the former they are guarded against evil; by the latter they deprive themselves of inward peace.

Sometimes good men, indulging groundless fears of hypocrisy, are blind to the clearest evidences of their gracious state; but more frequently, the merely formal, regardless of consequences, close their eyes upon the proofs of their guilt and jeopardy. This is an evil in regard to both, but less hazardous in one case than in the other. For he that sees not his own graces, and realizes not his privileges, does but deprive himself of quiet and enjoyment for a short time; whereas he that shuts his eyes against the evidences of his sin and condemnation, procures the endless destruction of his soul.\*

\* "The want of distinguishing in things that appertain to experimental religion, is one of the chief miseries of the professing world. It is attended with very many most dismal consequences: multitudes of souls are fatally deluded about themselves, and their own state, and so are eternally undone; hypocrites are confirmed in their delusions, and exceedingly puffed up with pride; many sincere Christians are dreadfully perplexed, darkened, tempted, and drawn aside from the way of duty; and sometimes sadly tainted with false religion, to the great dishonor of Christianity and hurt of their own souls. Some of the most dangerous and pernicious enemies of religion in the world (though they are called bright Christians) are encouraged and honored, who ought to be discountenanced and shunned by every body; and prejudices are

I shall endeavor in this chapter to make it evident, that among professors of religion, many are deceived; to assign the causes of their deception; and to make such inferences and reflections as the subject suggests.

## SECTION II.

That *many professors of religion are deceived*, is evident.

1. From the fact that there are *more professors than converts*. There are many professors of religion who are Christians only by education; who have grown as it were up into the church, but who have never been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Christ. Others have been induced by the influence of custom, by slavish fear, by ambition, or by more unworthy motives, to profess Christianity. Now all such deceive themselves, and while they accelerate their eternal ruin, they greatly increase its aggravations. Let them reflect, that to appear, in the view of men, like Christians, is one thing; to be Christians indeed, in the sight of God, is quite another; for except a man begotten and confirmed, in vast multitudes, against every thing wherein the power and essence of godliness consists; and in the end, Deism and Atheism are promoted."

President Edwards' Life of Brainerd.

be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

2. Many professors practise only an *outward* compliance with the commands of God. They know nothing of that inward, vital religion, which is seated in the affections of the heart, which subdues its sinful propensities and purifies its desires. But what will their external conformity avail? or what is it but a miserable imitation of that which lives in good men and prepares them for heaven? Surely it can have no better effect than to fit them at last to accuse and condemn themselves.\* Certain it is, that there are many professors of this class who, like Jehu, take no heed to walk in the way of the Lord God of Israel with their heart; who deceive themselves, or endeavor to deceive others; and who will sooner or later receive the fearful reward of their doings.

3. That many professors are self-deluded, appears from the circumstance that, in severe trials, numbers

\* "If we be not in good earnest in religion, and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing. The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so appropriate as in religion, and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious."

Edwards on the Affections.

*fall away.* They are removed from their steadfastness, as dry leaves are carried away by a tempest. "They go out from us, that it may be made manifest that they were not of us." "When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, they are quickly offended." Had they been told at first that their professions and zeal would terminate thus, probably their reply would have been like that of Hazaël to the man of God: "What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" Alas, how unlike is their brilliant and hopeful morning to their dark and gloomy evening! These professors have more of the moon than of the sun; they have little light, little heat, but many changes.\*

\* "It is with professors of religion, especially such as become so in a time of outpouring of the Spirit of God, as it is with blossoms in the spring; there are vast numbers of them upon the trees, which all look fair and promising, but yet many of them never come to any thing; and many of those that in a little time wither up, drop off, and rot under the trees, yet for a while look as beautiful and gay as others; and not only so, but smell sweet and send forth a pleasant odor, so that we cannot by any of our senses certainly distinguish those blossoms which have in them that secret virtue which will afterward appear in the fruit, and that inward solidity and strength which shall enable them to bear, and cause them to be perfected by the hot summer sun that will dry up the others. It is the mature fruit which comes afterward, and not the beautiful color and smell of the blossoms, that we

4. Another proof that there are numerous false professors is, that many secretly *indulge some beloved lust*, which, like a worm at the root, cripples and kills them. Such persons may have excellent gifts, and perform various and difficult duties; but pampering one lust, or allowing one secret sin, will destroy them. To cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye; to deny themselves and forsake all for Christ, requires such heart-religion as they do not possess. They study to exhibit a becoming exterior deportment; they refrain from open impieties, and visibly conform to their profession; and hence they acquire great confidence, and display themselves with much assurance; but they secretly love and practise iniquity, they cherish some known sin, and thus flatter, and deceive, and ruin their souls.\*

5. Those professors of religion who are unacquainted must judge by. So new converts, (professedly so,) in their talk about things of religion, may appear fair, and be very savory, and the saints may think they talk feelingly. They may relish their talk, and imagine they perceive a divine savor in it, and yet all may come to nothing."

Edwards on the Affections.

\* "The scriptural representations of the state of the Christian on earth, by the images of "a race," and "a warfare;" of its being necessary to rid himself of every circumstance which might retard him in the one, and to furnish himself with the whole armor of God for being victorious in the other, are, so far as these nominal Christians are concerned, figures of

customed to the daily practice of *secret devotion*, constitute not a small part of the multitude who are deceived. There are many who attend the public ordinances of religion, and who, either statedly or occasionally, engage in social worship with the family, but whose religion does not lead them to the closet, nor incline them to any unobserved intercourse with heaven. These people call themselves children of God, but their piety comprises nothing so personal, or particular, nothing which so much distinguishes them from the heedless world, which renders the hope of salvation so interesting, or the possibility of endless wo so horrible, as to give them a relish for prayer, devout meditation, and secret communion with God. They shrink from the idea of retiring by themselves and laying their hearts open to that invisible Being, that holy God, whom they profess to love and to worship; they contrive therefore to forget their secret, if not all their sins, to be unconscious of their wants, and

no propriety or meaning. As little have they, in correspondence with the scripture descriptions of the feelings and language of real Christians, any idea of acquiring a relish, while on earth, for the worship and service of heaven. If the truth must be told, their notion is rather a confused idea of future gratification in heaven, in return for having put a force upon their inclinations, and endured so much religion while on earth."

Wilberforce's View.



to impose on themselves by substituting casual outward formality for that godliness which has the promise of the life to come. Reader, if thy heart were right with God, and thou didst not cheat thyself with a vain profession, thou wouldst have frequent occasions for the peculiar duties of the closet, which thou wouldst conceal from thy familiar friend. "Charity vaunteth not itself." True piety can by no means entirely lay itself open to the eyes of men; public actions and appearance may support its credit, but secret exercises must maintain its life, and supply its purest enjoyment.

6. There are many professors who never made religion their *chief concern*, and who, therefore, though they have a name to live, are dead in sin. While there are those who 'give themselves to the Lord;' 'whose conversation and treasure is in heaven;' 'the end of whose life is Christ;' who give religion the precedence both in their affections and their time; and who are constant and unwearied in the service of God: there are also professors whose religion engrosses not their attention, and occupies little of their time; so far from being the chief object of their solicitude, it is treated as if any thing else was more important; and when they pretend to engage in it, their thoughts and hearts are somewhere else. It is not their design, in attending to the duties of religion, to honor or to have fellowship

with God, to become conformed to his law, to have their unholy propensities subdued, or the genuineness of their piety tried; they pray as if they prayed not, and hear as if they heard not; and if they derive no benefit from ordinances, if they acquire no animation from their discharge of duties, they are not disappointed, for they anticipated no such effects.

From these considerations it is sufficiently manifest that many professors of religion deceive themselves in regard to their real character.

### SECTION III.

There are *four principal causes* of the delusion and dissimulation of false professors.

1. *The deceitfulness of the heart.* The hearts of such men, and of all the impenitent, "are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." They are so full of sophistry and guile, so changeful and illusive in their operations, and so incurably and perversely inclined to evil, that they will be found at last to have been a sufficient cause of men's ruin. The wicked, when finally cast away, will be sensible that the shame and the blame of their perdition is ascribable wholly to themselves. They will see that the self-adulation, the hypocrisy, the unbelief, the contempt of vital piety, and the bold indifference to the invitations and threatenings of God's

word, which they have practised, were suited to prepare them for endless wo. Verily, "he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

2. False professors are eminently exposed to the diabolical arts and influence of the *great adversary*; they lay themselves open to his foul suggestions, and by their love of error and sensuality they both invite and ensure success to his artifices. Hence it is not to be wondered that he takes them captive at his will. He is the god of this world, that blinds the minds of them that believe not, and decoys the thoughtless into hell; they of all men are most ready to close with his devices and yield to his impostures. With reference to them, Basil represents this apostate spirit as thus insolently addressing Christ: "I have them! I have them! In spite of all thy blood and miracles, thy wooings and beseechings, thy knockings and strivings, I have cozened thee of them at the very gates of heaven."

3. The *effects* wrought in many unregenerate professors, the excitements of feeling, the raptures of fancy, the bliss of ideal safety, the pleasure of living as they list, without obscuring their prospects or disturbing their consciences, greatly increase and confirm their delusions. They do not distinguish between the operations and fruits of the Spirit of God in the sanctification of men, and the effects of error, of ignorance, of stupidity, of enthusiasm, or

of diabolical influence. Their own experience is the standard by which they judge of themselves; and that not unfrequently is such as to dazzle and infatuate them. They are ready to say, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Among those who are deceived in this way, some assume the office of religious teachers. Let them consider the words of Him by whom teachers must be judged: "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" To whom the Judge will say, "Depart from me, I never knew you."

4. The practice of *comparing themselves with others*, is a cause of deception among many. Thus the Pharisees, by trusting in themselves that they were righteous, and despising others, kept up a high opinion of their own merit. They elevated themselves by depressing those over whom they affected a superiority. Some false professors mentioned by St. Paul, "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves," proved that they were as deluded as they were foolish. Instead of making one man, or one set of men, a test for the trial of another, God has established his word as the only standard of character, and by this those who are saints indeed form an opinion of themselves. But many false professors want a more

lax and indefinite rule; they choose to compare themselves with characters that are in some respect subject to reproach. They are sharp-sighted to observe other men's faults, as they are their own supposed excellencies; they contemplate the failings of others with pity or derision, and their own doings with admiration. They bless themselves when they behold the impieties of the wicked: "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." A Christian may and ought to praise God that he has been made by grace to differ from some other men, but he cannot rake together the enormities of the worst characters, or the infirmities of the best, in order to justify and applaud himself, as these pharisaical deceivers do.\*

Such are some of the causes of that general delusion and imposture under which so many bow down and perish.

\* President Edwards, referring to spiritual pride, says, "He that is under the influence of this distemper is apt to think highly of his attainments in religion, as comparing himself with others. It is natural for him to fall into that thought of himself, that he is an eminent saint, that he is very high among the saints, and has distinguishingly good and great experiences." "Hence such are apt to put themselves forward among God's people," &c. "But he whose heart is under the power of Christian humility is of a contrary disposition."

## SECTION IV.

1. let me caution you to *beware* of inferring from what has been said, that *all professors of religion are deceivers*, and that there is no truth or integrity in any man; this would be, with intolerable arrogance, to affect the prerogative of God; and with desperate severity to judge the hearts of men.

Some men are as apt to conclude that those are hypocrites whose hearts they measure by their own, as others are to decide that themselves are saints, by comparing their fancied virtues with the vices and crimes of the most abandoned. But, blessed be God, there is some grain amidst the heaps of chaff and rubbish; the devil hath not the entire piece; a remnant is really and peculiarly the Lord's.

2. Let none imagine because so many are deceived, that *assurance* is unattainable. It is indeed a difficult acquisition, but is far from impracticable: hence all are commanded to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure."\*

\* "Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination as by action. The apostle Paul sought assurance chiefly this way, even by 'forgetting the things that were behind, and reaching forth unto those that were before, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in

3. I warn you not to *conceal* the truths of God or the graces of his Spirit, nor to be deterred from openly professing them, because many deceive themselves and others by a vain profession. Ought you to hide what you have, because another pretends to what he has not? The possession of holiness in your own soul is indeed what secures you from perdition; but the profession of it is what honors God, edifies the saints, and sometimes awakens sinners. Ostentation is sinful, but a serious and humble profession is an unquestionable duty.

## SECTION V.

Having guarded what has been said from abuse, I hasten to a more direct and special improvement of the subject. And surely I cannot better accomplish this, than by warning you to see to it, *that you be not of the number* who deceive themselves. Suffer me then to press that great apostolical caution, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." O look carefully to your foundation! "Be not high-minded, but fear." You may have done

Christ Jesus; if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.' And it was by this means, chiefly, that he obtained assurance: 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.' He obtained assurance of winning the prize more by running than by considering."

and suffered many things for religion's sake; you may have excellent gifts and great comforts, much zeal for God, and high confidence of your integrity, and all this may be right; but possibly it may be counterfeit and vain. Perhaps you have sometimes, upon examination, pronounced yourself upright; but remember that the Searcher of hearts has not yet delivered his final sentence; if he weigh you in the balance of truth and find you wanting, how will you be confounded and dismayed! Saints may look upon you with approbation, but they see not as God seeth; you may have a name to live while dead.

You know the fate of the apostate professors mentioned in the Gospel. Do they not all, as it were, cry to you with one voice, 'If you would not come where we are, flatter not yourselves as we did; if you expect a better portion, be sure that you get better hearts: had we been more self-suspicious, we had been more safe.'\*

I would not frighten you with groundless alarms,

\* Mr. Bunyan gives the following description of apostacy and despair, in the dialogue between Christian and the man in an iron cage:

"Then said Christian to the man, What art thou?

"The man answered, I am what I was not once.

"*Chr.* What wast thou once?

"*Man.* I was once a fair and flourishing professor, both in mine own eyes and also in the eyes of others: I was once,



but would gladly prevent fatal mistakes. Do you not find your heart deceitful in many things? Do you not shuffle over secret duties? Do you not condemn, in others, evils which you scarce reprove in yourself? Are there not many selfish ends in your performances? Do you not find that you are far less affected with a great deal of service done for God by others, than with a little done by yourself? Is it not hard for you to look without envy upon the excellencies of other men, or without pride upon your own? Are you not troubled by a busy devil, as well as by a bad heart? Has not he that circuits the whole world observed you? Has he not studied your constitutional failings, and discovered the sin that most easily besets you? Has he less malice toward your soul than toward those around you? Surely you are in the very thicket of temptations; as I thought, fair for the celestial city, and had then even joy at the thoughts that I should get thither.

“*Chr.* Well, but what art thou now?”

“*Man.* I am *now* a man of *despair*, and am shut up in it as in *this* iron cage. I cannot get out. O *now* I cannot!”

“*Chr.* But how camest thou in this condition?”

“*Man.* I left off to watch and be sober; I laid the reins upon the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the light of the word and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit, and he is gone; I tempted the devil, and he is come to me; I have provoked God to anger, and he has left me; I have so hardened my heart that I *cannot* repent.”

thousands of snares are on every side. Alas! how few of the professing and expecting world win heaven at last! With what difficulty are even the righteous saved! Therefore search your heart; and may this caution penetrate your inmost soul: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Away with such uncharitable censuring of others, and be more just and severe in rebuking yourself. Away with unprofitable controversies: spend your thoughts rather upon this momentous question, "Am I sound, or am I rotten at heart?" "Am I a new creature, or the old disguised in borrowed clothing." Let it be your prayer that you may not be deceived. Pray and labor that you may not be given up to a heedless and vain spirit, and then have religious duties for a show to beguile and hush your conscience.\*

\* Of the falling away of hypocrites, Mr. Bunyan says, "They draw off their thoughts, all that they may, from the remembrance of God, death, and judgment to come: then they cast off, by degrees, private duties, as closet prayer, curbing their lusts, watching, sorrow for sin, and the like: then they shun the company of lively and warm Christians: after that they grow cold to public duty, as hearing, reading, godly conference, and the like: then they begin to pick holes, as we say, in the coats of some of the godly, that they may have a seeming color to throw religion (for the sake of some infirmity they have spied in them) behind their backs: then they begin to adhere to and associate themselves with carnal

Surely that ground-work upon which your hope for eternal life is built cannot be too safely laid. I dare promise you, that when you come to die, you will not regret having devoted much time and attention to this matter. Whilst others then are panting after the dust of the earth, and crying who will show us any good? do you endeavor after the full *assurance* of the love of God.

Deceive not yourself with names and notions; they cannot change your heart. If you are still impenitent, if you have not been renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God, it matters little by what name you are called, or how warmly you advocate the distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel; you are in the sight of God a guilty, perishing sinner.

Once more, then, I warn you to examine the foundation upon which you rest: deceive not yourself; behold, the Judge who knows your works standeth at the door.

men: then they give loose to carnal and wanton discourses in secret; and glad are they if they can see such things in any that are counted honest, that they may the more boldly do it through their example. After this, they begin to play with little sins openly: and then, being hardened, they show themselves as they are. Thus being launched again into the gulf of misery, unless a miracle of grace prevent it, they everlastingly perish in their own deceivings."

## SECTION VI.

To conclude: If, as we have reason to believe, a great many professors of religion, and others whose hopes are not less sanguine, are fatally deceived, then it becomes those who have good reason to believe that they are indeed the children of God, to *praise and glorify him* for his mercy as long as they live. There are doubtless many real Christians who do not themselves perceive such evidence of their gracious state as fully to satisfy them; but let them not be discouraged; let them resolutely persevere, and constantly live as the grace of God teacheth. And let such as have daily unequivocal evidence of their sanctification, freely enjoy the elevated happiness and the transporting anticipations peculiar to their state of mind.

## CHAPTER III.

*Showing that holiness, or saving grace, is exceedingly valuable, and greatly enriches its possessor.*

## SECTION I.

We may easily satisfy ourselves from several considerations that the value of saving grace is not to be described or conceived.

1. If we consider it in respect to its cause, we shall find that it is a *peculiar work* or fruit of the divine Spirit; who on this account is called "the Spirit of grace," and "the Spirit of holiness." All the rules of morality, with all possible human diligence and effort, alone, can never produce one gracious act, or one holy exercise. Such, indeed, is the incomparable worth of efficacious grace, that all other gifts of the Spirit are represented in Scripture to be comparatively worthless.

2. The *nature of saving grace* implies its unspeakable value. It is that by which the saints are made to resemble God in moral beauty and goodness; that which renders them objects of the divine complacency, and fits them to glorify and enjoy their Creator and Redeemer for ever.

3. It appears peculiarly excellent, if we reflect

that it is bestowed only upon those whom God has chosen to everlasting life. It is not, like many other gifts, made common to all.

4. The *influence and fruits* of saving grace in the souls of saints, proclaim its unspeakable worth.

It elevates and ennobles, adorns and beautifies the soul; it raises the affections to heaven, employs them upon divine objects, and transforms the heart into the image of God; it preserves the saints from known and allowed iniquity; it establishes them in faith and peace on the Rock of Ages; it is the root of all the fruit which they bring forth unto God—of every gracious word in their lips, and every gracious work in their hands; be the matter of their good thoughts, their heavenly discourses, and holy prayers never so excellent, grace is the root and source of them.

5. Its exceeding value will appear if we consider its *properties*. The most expressive epithets are employed to describe it. It is unfailing and immortal; it is as “a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life;” it will not fail and perish with your mortal body, but with the soul, from which it is inseparable, will ascend to glory. You may outlive your friends, your estate, and whatever else you now possess, but if you have true holiness, it will endure as long as you exist.

6. Nor is its value less conspicuous in the *design*

with which it is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, to purify us from all iniquity, to free us from imperfection, and to render us meet for the heavenly inheritance, for the service and enjoyment of God above.

7. The *means* adopted to procure the dispensation of grace to men, and those employed in producing and preserving holiness in the saints, are conclusive evidence of its infinite worth. The incarnation, the sufferings, and the intercession of Jesus Christ, were necessary to prepare the way; the special agency of the Holy Spirit is necessary to produce the effect. The ordinances and institutions of the Gospel were first appointed, and have been continued, in order that holiness might be produced and preserved in the hearts of saints; nay, the ordinary dispensations of Providence are designed in some way to subserve this purpose.

8. The *peculiar regard* vouchsafed by the Most High God to every degree, every exercise, and every fruit of holiness in his people, demonstrates its unspeakable importance and worth: he who made the jewel best knows its value.

9. That holiness is most excellent and desirable, is shown by the hypocritical *pretences* made to it all over the professing world. If it did not confer some singular advantage, why should men pant for the reputation of possessing it? But so it is, that the devil

himself conceals many of his lures and hooks of temptation with a show of grace ; knowing, as he does, that sin has nothing beautiful or winning in itself by which to entice, he disguises it under a pretence of goodness. Let hypocrites and self-deceivers consider what they shall answer at last, when it is demanded : “ If grace were evil, why did you so affect the reputation of it ? if good, why did you content yourself with the empty name of it ? ”

10. In a word, the incomparable value of saving grace is manifested by the *esteem* which all good men have for it. Holiness is the sum of their prayers, the scope of their endeavors, the substance of their joys, the relief of their afflictions and sufferings ; it constitutes their riches and their glory.

## SECTION II.

1. Is saving grace thus valuable and precious ? Beware, ye who possess it, lest your hearts should be elated with *spiritual pride*. You have need often to reflect on your former state of sin and condemnation, and on your present ill-desert and imperfection ; to consider how and by whom you have been made to differ from them that perish ; to ask what you have that you have not received ; to feel your weakness, your dependence, and your obligations ; and to remember that it is the nature of ho-



liness to render men humble and lowly in heart and life.\*

2. Is holiness more excellent than gold? Well then may the poorest Christian be content with the allotments of Providence. Ye who are destitute of this world's goods, but rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised; ye who feel the rigors of temporal poverty, but who have treasures in heaven, think of your imperishable wealth, and neither thirst for an earthly portion nor murmur at temporary wants. Thousands, alas! who are pennyless, and thousands who have worldly wealth, are without Christ and without hope.

\* "An infallible sign of spiritual pride is persons being apt to think highly of their humility. False experiences are commonly attended with a counterfeit humility; and it is the very nature of a counterfeit humility to be highly conceited of itself. False religious affections have generally a tendency, especially when raised to a great height, to make persons think that their humility is great, and accordingly to take much notice of their great attainments in this respect, and admire them. But eminently gracious affections (I scruple not to say it) are evermore of a contrary tendency, and have universally a contrary effect in those that have them. They indeed make them very sensible what reason there is that they should be deeply humbled, and cause them earnestly to thirst and long after it; but they make their present humility, or that which they have already attained to, appear small, and their remaining pride great, and exceedingly abominable."

3. If holiness is thus valuable, then those Christians who suffer it to decline, or who do not grow in grace, incur such *loss* as all this world's goods are not sufficient to repair.

4. If holiness is of such worth and importance, then the ordinances and institutions of religion, and all the means adapted to preserve and increase it, ought to be highly esteemed and diligently employed.

5. If saving grace be so excellent, it becomes saints to be peculiarly *watchful* and circumspect in times of degeneracy and temptation. We have read of Christians who resisted unto blood, striving against sin, who chose to part with their lives rather than relax in their piety: if we would endure unto the end, we must follow their example. We live in an age of deception and temptation. Many seeming Christians have fallen and lost all; and many real Christians have lost so much, that instead of again enjoying the comforts of piety in this world, they are likely to go to the grave repeating the lamentation of Job: "O that it were with me as in months past!"

6. Let me urge and entreat you to make it the great business of your life, the chief concern of every day, to grow in grace—to perfect holiness in the fear of God, and to do his will in all things. Cultivate every advantage of time and place; im-

prove the society of God's people, and let your closet testify that your love of holiness is stronger than death.

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## CHAPTER IV.

*true holiness which will endure the tests appointed or permitted for its discovery.*

### SECTION I.

It has pleased God to place all his people in this world in a state of trial; he first tries, then crowns them. James, 1: 12. No man can determine whether his graces are true or false until they are examined by something which, to them, shall be what fire is to gold. The Laodiceans imagined themselves to be rich in grace, but they proved to be wretchedly poor; wherefore Christ counsels them to buy of him gold tried in the fire—true holiness, which should endure the severest scrutiny.

The Scriptures plainly recognize a trial of men's opinions, as well as of their graces; but of the former I shall have occasion to say little. Doubtless men may endanger and obstruct their salvation by unscriptural sentiments; yet if they have holiness of heart, notwithstanding some false opinions, "they

shall be saved, though it be as by fire ;” but if they are devoid of holiness, the most correct speculation will avail them nothing ; they must perish, and perish without remedy.

The trial of a man’s graces, or religious affections, is all-important ; as they are, so is his safety and happiness, and so his prospect for eternity.

This trial may be considered in two respects :

1. As it is to be performed by ourselves. “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves ;” scrutinize your hearts in the light of divine truth ; ascertain and demonstrate whether your affections are holy.

2. As it is executed by Him “who searcheth the heart, and judgeth according to truth.”

With a view to both these kinds of trial, but especially the former, I propose in this treatise,

I. To show what tries the genuineness of Christian graces as fire tries gold.

II. To exhibit the ends for which God appoints such trials of the holiness of his people in this world.

III. To prove that such only is true holiness as will bear these trials.

IV. To improve and apply the whole.

## SECTION II.

Before I enter into particulars, it seems needful to observe that the subject to which we are approaching is full of *difficulties*. Without much cautious discrimination and solicitude with regard to the various and dissimilar capacities and attainments and circumstances of different Christians, one could hope to do little else but confuse and mislead. Nor is less care necessary in the application of tests or signs; they should be well examined and approved before we try ourselves or others by them.\*

Signs or tests of character are by some distinguished as exclusive, inclusive, and positive. *Exclusive* marks serve to shut out bold pretenders, by showing them that they are utterly devoid of a sav-

\* "It is strange how hardly men are brought to be contented with the rules and directions Christ has given them, but they must needs go by other rules of their own inventing, that seem to them wiser and better. I know of no directions or counsels which Christ ever delivered more plainly than the rules he has given us to guide us in our judging of others' sincerity, viz. that we should judge of the tree chiefly by the fruit. But yet this will not do; other ways are found out which are imagined to be more distinguishing and certain. And woful have been the mischievous consequences of this arrogant setting up men's wisdom above the wisdom of Christ."

Edwards on the Affections.

ing work of grace. They are commonly taken from some indispensable ordinary duty, as praying or hearing; which men may indeed perform, and yet have no degree of holiness; but the neglect of which demonstrates the total absence of any work of grace.

*Inclusive* marks serve to discover the degree rather than the existence of holiness, and are intended for comfort rather than conviction. If we perceive them in ourselves, we shall find not only real but eminent piety; as they arise from the higher exercises of grace in confirmed and mature Christians.

Between these there are marks or evidences called *positive*, which are always found in those, and those only, who have been regenerated. In the application of these great care is requisite, since they relate as well to the feeblest as to the most advanced Christian. It is especially necessary to be aware of representing the particular exercises or experience of those who are esteemed eminent in knowledge and grace, as a rule for those whose attainments are small. This practice is justly reprobated for its absurdity and its injurious effects.

These things being premised, I will now proceed to show what things in particular try the temper and state of our souls: "What tries the genuineness of Christian graces as fire tries gold."

It is true that all the circumstances of our life,

every event which has relation to us, may make some discovery of our hearts; but some limits must be prescribed to this treatise; I shall therefore show, in the following order, what trials are made of our graces by prosperity and adversity, by our inward corruptions, our active duties, and lastly, by our sufferings on account of religion.

### SECTION III.

PROSPERITY, worldly success, outward enjoyments, riches, honors, try men's hearts and reveal their thoughts. Some may fancy the fire of prosperity to be designed rather for comfort than for trial; rather to refresh than to search us; but scarcely any thing more clearly demonstrates the falseness or soundness of religion; it is to grace what fire is to gold. Particularly, it occasions an exhibition of the self-flattery and delusion of those who have had a name to live while dead; and of the unequivocal evidences of religion in real saints.

Among the proofs thus exhibited of dissimulation and deceit, are the following:

1. Prosperity occasions in some men a stupid *forgetfulness of God* and neglect of the duties of religion. They fall asleep in the lap of abundance, and dream not that there is a God to be served and a soul to be saved. Their carnal pleasures and en-

joyments, and the care of their earthly affairs, leave no time for prayer, or for reflections concerning death and futurity. Like Herod, they are lifted up with conceits of their own greatness and importance; and like him, they mock the supremacy of Jehovah, or contemn his authority, instead of obeying his commands. They are so busied in serving and gratifying themselves, that usually they lose the faint appearance of piety which, in other circumstances, they might have exhibited.

2. Prosperity, meeting with one who is graceless, engrosses his thoughts and affections, and makes him wholly *sensual*. Earthly things have a tendency to transform men's hearts into their own similitude—to assimilate them to their nature; and upon those whose religion is mere pretence, they produce their full effect. Such in times of prosperity, when temptations are presented and the means of indulgence within reach, will abandon themselves to sensual gratifications, and show to the world the depravity of their hearts and dissoluteness of their character. It is true that prosperity may have a very unhappy influence on the minds of good men, but it can never produce in them such effects as have been mentioned; the allurements of forbidden objects and the enticements of sin will be counteracted by the principles, the habits, and feelings of genuine piety. Some indeed, confessedly destitute of



true religion, and surrounded by all the facilities and incitements to sensuality which prosperity can confer, are yet, in their exterior deportment, strictly moderate and regular. Perhaps those men who in ordinary circumstances had made a false show of religion, are, when prosperity suddenly attends them, most likely to be carried by it down the stream of sensuality; but all who are affected in this way by prosperous circumstances, are evidently graceless.

3. Mere pretenders to religion, self-deceivers, and dissemblers, are apt, when prosperity surrounds them, not only to lose all concern for their own salvation, but to *harden themselves* against the judgments of God and the calamities and suffering which his people endure. Instances of this kind are but too common; and they designate characters which cannot be mistaken. Such are some of the ways in which prosperity operates upon those who have not true religion.

#### SECTION IV.

I proceed to show the influence of prosperity on *the people of God*. That the saints sometimes fall into temptation, cannot be denied; and doubtless the trial of prosperity often discovers in them the workings of sin; but its general influence upon God's

children is such as to render their graces more conspicuous, and their uprightness more certain.

1. A real saint, when prosperity and abundance flow around him, will earnestly endeavor to suppress any workings of pride, and to *preserve humility* and lowliness in heart and life. I do not say that every child of God under prosperity will at all times feel and manifest the same degree of humility; but I am sure that there is that in every one of them, when thus tried, which will check and allay the risings of vanity and ambition.\* God's people have seen, and still see, too much of their own hearts, too much of this world, and too much of the divine excellence and loveliness of heavenly objects to be easily elated or long satisfied with worldly prosperity; they consider the temptations and dangers accompanying it, as well as the obligations and responsibility which it occasions, and feel the motives thus furnished to humility and self-abasement. They consider themselves as stewards of God, to whose care much has been committed, and from whom, therefore, much will be required.

2. Prosperity excites the *love* and *gratitude* of the saints to God, the author of their mercies: while it

\* "The comforts of the true saints increase awakening and caution, and a lively sense how great a thing it is to appear before an infinitely holy, just, and omniscient Judge."

inflames the sinner's lusts, it fills the good man's heart with benevolent and grateful affections. Not that these outward things are the primary reasons or motives of his love to God; far from it: he loves him when he takes them away, as well as when he bestows them; but God sanctifies prosperity to his people, makes it conducive to their spiritual welfare and subservient to their usefulness in the world.

3. The smiles of Providence usually render holy men increasingly *watchful* against sin. Thus they reflect: 'Hath God favored and prospered me? then I am under the greater obligation to obey and please him.' They cannot sin because grace hath abounded, as they would not dare to sin that grace might abound.

4. A child of God will not be satisfied with all the prosperity and outward comforts in the world as *his portion*. When Providence became more than ordinarily bountiful of temporal things to Luther, he became anxious, and earnestly protested against being put off with them. A lukewarm self-deceiver will eagerly take earthly things for his chief good: if his selfish projects are not frustrated, if he can make sure of the world, he will easily forget God, and leave heaven and hell at hazard. But the Lord is ever the portion of the saints; they have chosen him for their eternal inheritance, and no earthly thing can occupy his place in their affections.

## CHAPTER V.

*Showing what trial is made of men's hearts by ADVERSITY.*

## SECTION I.

That ADVERSITY is adapted to try men's hearts none can doubt who have either studied the Scriptures or observed human experience. When the dross of corruption and the rust of hypocrisy had nearly eaten out the heart of religion among the Jews, God said, "I will melt them and try them;" accordingly they were cast into the furnace of affliction and tried.

Prosperity multiplies professors, but adversity brings them to such a test that the precious are separated from the vile. Job was tried by adversity, and although some dross was discovered, he came forth as gold. By adversity is brought out to view not only the hypocrisy and corruption of the wicked, but also the sincerity and holiness of the righteous: it manifests the faith and patience of the saints.

In discussing this topic it will be necessary to inquire what effects are common both to the sound and unsound, and what are peculiar to each, from the trial of adversity.

## SECTION II.

The following particulars relating to adversity may apply *both to saints and sinners.*

1. Both may entertain *fears* of adversity when they perceive its approach. While impending judgments cause sinners in Zion to tremble, and fill hypocrites with fearfulness; saints also, though for different reasons, may be agitated with concern and apprehension.

2. When the cup of affliction comes, the holy as well as the sinful may receive it with *reluctance*. The wicked will, indeed, ever loath and resent it; and though accompanied by a thousand mitigations to the righteous, they also may shrink from it.

3. Troubles, disappointments, and pain may sometimes produce *impatience* in saints as well as in sinners. Flesh and blood can hardly endure anguish and privation with composure. But if in such circumstances grace is not always so powerful in God's people as to overcome the propensity to disquiet, it will restrain them from such indulgence as the wicked allow.

4. The ungodly as well as the godly may be *driven to their closets* and their knees by their adversity; the former perhaps for the first time, the latter with increased punctuality and engagedness.

I need not detail the different *motives* of saints and sinners when in similar conditions their external appearance and conduct is in some respects alike: I therefore pass on to those things which are peculiar to each.

## SECTION III.

Here, in the first place, let us consider the discoveries made by adversity of the hearts of *unsanctified men*.

1. An unsanctified man is not easily made to recognize and acknowledge the *hand of God* in the calamities and troubles which have befallen him. He is prone to refer them to some natural cause, or to suppress the idea of any producer of them, or to charge them to the malice or negligence of men. Thus the creature bounds his horizon; and he contrives to secure his conscience from alarm.

2. Unsanctified men are not apt in seasons of adversity to retire into their closets, to search their hearts, to ascertain what they have done, to repent of their wickedness, and submit themselves to God. Afflictions rarely lead them to self-examination; they do not choose to think that they have done any thing to occasion their troubles.

3. A man destitute of real religion, if left to his own choice, would *prefer sin to affliction*, and really consider it less evil; he can contemplate the defilement of his soul with composure, rather than suffer the loss of his goods, his pleasures, or his present ease: and thus the unsoundness of his heart is discovered. The saints, on the contrary, will never,

knowingly, consent to the commission of sin, if it might prevent ever so much personal suffering or loss.

4. Unregenerate men in adversity will turn from creature to creature in pursuit of comfort and relief, instead of leaving all creatures and repairing to God for support; and when all their creature-comforts fail they sink in despondency.

5. An unsanctified man never comes out of the furnace of affliction *purified*, humbled, and made better than when he was cast into it; the fire does not consume his dross, but the more he is afflicted the worse he becomes. The reason is plain; afflictions themselves cannot purify men's souls, and those which come upon the wicked are not sanctified to them. Think of this, ye that have had numberless afflictions of one kind or other, but have derived no benefit from any of them!

#### SECTION IV.

The reader may now be desirous to know what effects adversity has upon sincere humble *Christians*: but before I proceed, let it be observed that they realize these effects, not so much while the trial continues, as after it is past, when they have opportunity for calm reflection. The fruits of sanctified affliction are lasting, and they affect the Christian's

whole temper and deportment: still some particular effects may be mentioned, which are produced in all upright hearts.

1. Every real Christian, in time of affliction and adversity, will make *God his refuge* and look to him for comfort and relief. "I found," saith David, "sorrow and trouble, then called I upon the name of the Lord."

2. The people of God particularly recognize *his providence* in all their adversities and troubles, whatever instruments may intervene. And this apprehension of the divine agency is fundamental to that communion with God which saints in affliction maintain, and to the holy submission and heavenly composure which they feel.

3. Christians are heartily disposed to *justify* God in the severest afflictions which come upon them, as well as in all his other dealings: the scripture proofs of this are so numerous that it would be superfluous to quote them. They may receive treatment from men which they are conscious they do not deserve; but if God should add condemnation to affliction, they would vindicate not only his character and government, but his dispensations to them.

4. Good men in adversity *examine themselves*, and endeavor to ascertain why they are afflicted; to find what they have done or neglected, on account of which God contendeth with them. Their prayer is,



“That which I see not teach thou me; show me if there is any evil way in me.”

5. Every real Christian deliberately chooses to continue in adversity, rather than to be delivered from it by any *sinful means*. Christians are not insensible to pain, but rather than sin against God, they can cheerfully submit to privations and sufferings.

6. The people of God fail not to *bless him* for sanctified afflictions; esteeming the happy effects of them on their own minds more highly than deliverance from them. If their affections are weaned from this world, if their sinful propensities are mortified, if they are advanced in the divine life, and made more meet for heaven by adversity, they never think it too great or too long continued.

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## CHAPTER VI.

*Discovering the soundness or corruption of men's hearts by the manner in which they regard INDWELLING SIN.*

### SECTION I.

Nothing more thoroughly discloses the real state of men's hearts than the manner in which they regard INDWELLING SIN, or the practice of sin: this topic, therefore, deserves a careful and ample elucidation.

Several considerations relative to the views and feelings entertained by holy and sinful men respecting the practice of sin, and sin in the heart, must be mentioned in order to manifest who are the children of God and who of the wicked one.

#### SECTION II.

By considering the *different reasons* for which saints and sinners respectively *abstain* from the indulgence of sin, we may perhaps ascertain to which class we belong.

1. A false professor, or unrenewed man, may abstain from some sins because they are *inconsistent* with the commission of others. Thus hypocrisy and profaneness, prodigality and covetousness, are opposed to each other, so that but one can reign at a time.

2. An unsanctified man may be hindered from the commission of some sins by the *restraint* of divine Providence. It often happens, when men have conceived sin and are ready to execute it, that they are unexpectedly prevented; and through these interpositions of Providence, by which the designs of the wicked are overthrown, the world is saved from numberless evils.

3. A wicked man may abstain from some sins merely because the commission of them is incon-

sistent with his constitutional make, or repugnant to his *health*. Thus some men cannot be drunkards if they would; others cannot be covetous and base.

4. Men totally destitute of moral goodness may be deterred from the commission of many sins by the force of *education*, the principles of morality, the authority of superiors, or the influence of popular opinion.

5. Such men may abstain from many sins through fear of their *temporal consequences*. Thus they may avoid such sins as are punishable by human laws, and such as are followed by infamy and detestation among men; and some even look further, to the punishment of sin hereafter; they are not afraid to sin, but they are afraid to burn.

These are some of the reasons why ungodly men sometimes refrain from the commission of sin.

### SECTION III.

The reasons for which the saints abstain from indulging in or committing sin are such as manifest them to be children of God.

1. A primary reason why they abstain is, that all sin is opposition to the *Being whom they love supremely*, and who is worthy of all love and obedience. The love of God which is shed abroad in their hearts, renders indulgencies peculiarly painful

to them, and so far as it prevails, is an effectual restraint.

2. The saints cherish a *holy fear* of God, which renders the indulgence of sin exceedingly odious and repugnant to them. This fear exists wherever holy love and adoring reverence are exercised toward the supreme Being; and good men are as much actuated by it in secret as in public; it keeps alive the reflection that the eye of Omniscience is upon them.

3. They feel a settled aversion to the indulgence of sin on account of its evil and injurious *nature*, its polluting and debasing influence, and its horrible effects; they have an abhorrence of it on its own account, which greatly restrains them from sinful thoughts and feelings, as well as actions.

4. The people of God abstain from sin because it is repugnant to the holy *principles* by which they are actuated, and contrary to the pious habits which it is their happiness to cultivate. They find their enjoyment in the performance of duty, and feel the influence of a thousand motives to constancy in the discharge of it; but the indulgence of iniquity in heart or life fills them with regret and misery; it wounds their own souls, obstructs their peace, and dishonors the cause in which their present and eternal interests are involved.

5. It is the nature of that repentance which cha-

racterizes the saints, to turn them *from sin* in every form. They hate and abhor it for its own sake, for its intrinsic evil; they loathe themselves on account of it; they are filled with holy sorrow, with ingenuous self-condemnation, abasement and regret in view of it, as committed against God. Thus those who have felt the workings of genuine repentance are, as it were, impelled to abstain from every kind of disobedience.

6. The children of God remember that the blessed Jesus suffered the death of *the cross* on account of sin; 'therefore the love of Christ constraineth them; for they thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again. Their old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, so that henceforth they should not serve sin.'

#### SECTION IV.

The character of saints and sinners respectively is manifested by their **HATRED OF SIN**. A few particulars will suffice to show why the *wicked* sometimes hate sin.

1. Although an unholy man will not hate sin for its own sake, nor as existing in himself, yet he may

exercise a kind of hatred toward it as exhibited *in others*. Thus a proud man may hate the appearance of pride in his neighbor. He that has a beam in his own eye, a grossly corrupt heart or depraved practice, may be quick to espy a mote in another's eye, some comparatively venial fault, and be swelled with disgust and aversion on account of it.

2. A wicked man may hate sin as a criminal may hate the gallows, for its *effects*; its guilt, its intrinsic evil, excites no concern, but its connection with hell is odious. The unsound professor sometimes wishes that there were no threatenings in the Bible against sin. When sin entices, 'I would,' saith he, 'but I fear the consequences; could I separate thee from perdition, I would gladly comply.'

3. The hatred of sin which sinners from various motives may sometimes feel, is *not habitual* and permanent; it is not such as greatly to weaken their love of iniquity in themselves, or their approbation of it in the general practice of the world.

The *people of God* hate sin for totally different reasons, and their hatred is of an opposite nature.

1. They hate it because it is evil *in itself*, because it is opposed to the supreme Being and to all goodness, and ruinous in its influence and effects. Its evil and odious nature excites hatred and opposition wherever the love of holiness exists.

2. They hate it *in themselves* more than as exhi-

bited by others; for they are more affected by the consciousness of their own sins than by the consideration of those which they perceive in their neighbors.

3. They hate not this and that sin merely, but sins of every description, *all sin*; which no hypocrite, or self-deceiver, or unregenerate man can ever pretend.

4. They hate sin with an *irreconcilable* aversion; nothing could induce them to regard it as they once did; they have begun to oppose it, and will never cease to abhor and contend against it until this warfare shall cease to be necessary.

5. Their hatred of it is *supreme*; they hate it as the root and essence of all evil; their aversion to it is equalled in strength only by their love of holiness.

6. Such is their detestation of sin, that they gladly cherish the thoughts of *death, as a deliverance* from it, with all its odious and defiling accompaniments.

#### SECTION V.

The *troubles and sorrows* which men have on account of *sin* discover who has genuine and who false religion.

All concern on account of sin does not imply true religion; some have reason to be alarmed in view of their concern itself.

1. Such are they who are troubled when they have committed some gross sins which startle conscience, but who are not filled with anxiety and penitence for secret sins, for sins of thought, for sins which defile the soul, for all sin.

2. They undoubtedly have graceless hearts who are distressed at the discovery of their sins by others, but who are not troubled on account of their guilt. Multitudes there are of this class: they are not awed by the consideration that God sees them; they are concerned chiefly that their appearance before men may be reputable; they scruple not to commit ten sins against God in order to hide one from the eyes of men.

3. An unholy man may be greatly distressed with the sufferings or embarrassments which his sins have brought upon him, while he regards not the sins themselves.

But the distress and anxiety of the *saints* on account of sin are of another kind, and imply a very different character.

1. They are troubled because God is dishonored, because his holy law is violated, and the interest of his kingdom disregarded or opposed.

2. They are troubled because sin defiles and debases their souls, renders them unfit for the presence and enjoyment of a holy God, and interrupts their love of purity.



3. Sin brings trouble and sorrow to the people of God, by occasioning the withdrawment of his gracious presence, and obstructing their communion with him.

4. Their distress and anguish on account of sin are far greater, far more pungent, than any other men feel; they can bear other troubles, while they nearly sink under those occasioned by sin.

5. They give vent to the sorrow and misery which they feel on account of sin, rather in secret than in the presence of their most intimate acquaintance; indeed they can hardly express what they feel to mortals, but God knows their hearts, and to him they can unbosom themselves without embarrassment or fear of misapprehension.

6. They never obtain relief from these troubles by such means as unsanctified men employ; they apply to the Physician of souls, and are relieved only when they obtain pardon and reconciliation through his blood.

#### SECTION VI.

Let us now consider the difference between saints and sinners in regard to their *subjection to the dominion of sin*. The Scriptures plainly teach us that the wicked willingly yield themselves to the reigning power of sin, and that the righteous do not. It

will be necessary to show what may be common to them both in relation to this subject, what distinguishes those who are under the dominion of sin, and what is peculiar to those who have been freed from the bondage of sin and death, in order to judge correctly of our own character.

1. Both saints and sinners may be guilty of gross offences; but we cannot thence infer that sin reigns in one as well as in the other. None are free from the workings of indwelling sin, which may sometimes hurry good men into uncommon acts of wickedness, which the wicked willingly and habitually indulge.

2. Nor does it follow that both are under the dominion of sin, from the mere fact that they are repeatedly guilty of the same acts of wickedness; though such repetition on the part of one who professes religion tends greatly to bring his sincerity into question.

3. Though a saint, under certain circumstances, may be impatient of reproof for sin as the wicked are, yet from that alone it cannot safely be concluded that he, like them, is under the power of sin.

4. If some particular sin has more power than another in a good man as well as in sinners, it is not therefore certain that he is as much under the dominion of that sin as they are.

5. Though both good and bad men commit sins

against knowledge, it will not thence follow that such sins reign in the former as they do in the latter.

## SECTION VII.

I proceed to notice some things by which *the dominion of sin is implied*.

1. The dominion of sin consists in its prevailing sway over men, and their voluntary subjection to it; hence deliberate consent to acts of wickedness, or to sinful thoughts and feelings, proves that sin reigns in the heart. Good men do not thus consent, though they may every day commit sin, and sometimes through the violence of temptation fall into gross iniquity.

2. The habitual practice of sin shows its dominion over the heart.

3. Delight in the ways of iniquity implies the uncontrolled authority of sin and a willing subjection to it; hence it is said of the servants of sin, "that they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations."

4. Impatience of Christ's government and service, weariness of serious exercises and pious habits, and love of amusement, indicate a heart subject to the dominion of sin.

There remain to be considered some particulars, to show that the *saints are not in subjection* to sin as the wicked are.

1. If they fall into sin, they cannot reflect on it without shame and sorrow; but the wicked either derive satisfaction from the review of their sinful indulgencies, or with stupid insensibility dismiss them from their recollection.

2. When the people of God fall into one sin, they are greatly excited by that to guard against the commission of others; not so the servants of sin; the more they practise iniquity, the more their inclination to sin is strengthened.

3. It is the prevailing desire and earnest prayer of the saints to be in every respect freed from sin, from the love, the influence, and the practice of it; on the contrary, those who serve sin, consider their bondage to be liberty; they love their lusts, and would esteem deliverance from them a hardship.

4. The saints pray for nothing more frequently or more ardently than to be kept from the commission of sin; they implore nothing more earnestly than the assistance of God's grace to fortify them against temptations; they have scarcely any occasions of more lively gratitude and joy than are furnished by those interpositions of Providence which prevent their falling into sin; they use their own best endeavors to avoid the occasions of sin; they are unhappy when they have gone astray; and they have comfort and peace only when piously engaged in the discharge of some duty; from all which it is

evident that they are not under the dominion of sin, and do not allowedly practise it.

## SECTION VIII.

There remains to be considered one particular with reference to the manner in which men regard sin ; it is their *opposition to it*, whether in heart or practice.

1. There is a universal and a particular opposition to sin ; the former is maintained by the regenerate, the latter may be exerted by unregenerate men. As the saints hate, so they oppose *every false way* ; and they must needs do so, for they hate and oppose sin on its own account, because it is sin ; with them, therefore, there can be no reservation, no favorite lust, which will not, with sin in every form, meet their aversion and resistance.

But on the contrary, if unsanctified men make any opposition to open immoralities, they will reserve and cherish their own secret sins ; for they are not opposed to sin as such, but rather to its disgraceful or fatal effects.

2. The opposition of the saints to sin is founded not merely nor chiefly in their consciences, but in their *hearts* ; whereas, if wicked men discountenance it from any other than worldly motives, their dislike arises so entirely from the remonstrances of

conscience, that their hearts will at the same time love and defend it as earnestly as ever.

There is an irreconcilable enmity and aversion between a holy heart and all sin ; therefore the reason, the conscience, and the affections of good men are opposed to it ; but sin is the very element of unholy hearts, the wicked love its ways, and if their consciences oppose it, they hate their consciences rather than the thing opposed.

3. Sin is *habitually* and perpetually opposed by the people of God ; they have waged a war of extermination against it, and while the enemy is unsubdued, will never cease to contend ; but the partial opposition of sinners is unsteady and transient, being remitted and renewed as interest, or caprice, or slavish fear shall direct.

4. They who are sanctified oppose *the root* as well as the branches, the existence as well as the influence and effects of sin ; but the wicked are concerned only to prevent its unhappy consequences.

5. The saints, in the *strength of the Lord* and the power of his might, exert themselves to oppose sin ; but the ungodly trust in an arm of flesh, in the strength of their resolutions or the security of their self-righteousness ; the weapons which they employ in this warfare are not spiritual but carnal, and therefore impotent and futile.

6. Such is the opposition made by the saints

against sin, that their unholy propensities are *subdued*, their sanctification is promoted, and their progress in the divine life accelerated; but the wicked gain no advantage by their feeble and inconstant proceedings against sin; they may in their way pray and hear, and vow and resolve, and when all is done, they are still the servants of sin, their corruptions are unsubdued, and their hearts devoid of holiness.

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## CHAPTER VII.

*Disclosing the trial which is made of men's hearts by the manner in which they PERFORM THE DUTIES OF RELIGION.*

The following observations will illustrate this topic and show the difference between saints and sinners, between those who perform their religious duties acceptably, and those who do not.

1. The *designs and desires* of men, when they attempt to discharge their religious duties, show what they are at heart. The designs and expectations of hypocrites, self-deceivers, and other unsanctified men, are ever low and contracted, adapted to answer their worldly ends, or merely to quiet their consciences; but those of God's people, on the contrary, are liberal and elevated, suited to glorify God and procure important blessings to themselves.

2. The objects which occupy *men's hearts* when they attempt to engage in the duties of religion, will lead to a discovery of their character. Those who are destitute of real holiness take little heed to their hearts, being comparatively indifferent whether they are wholly unaffected or employed upon earthly objects; but it is the earnest wish and endeavor of the saints to have their hearts fully occupied with divine things, to have their attention fixed, their affections elevated, and their motives pure.

3. The *conscientiousness* of men in the discharge of their private as well as public duties, must not be overlooked in estimating their characters. Unsanctified men may be driven by their consciences to the closet and the sanctuary, but they are not conscientious either in stately repairing to them or in performing their appropriate duties; a thousand worldly motives may, indeed, influence them to affect religion in public, which will not allure them into retirement for the purposes of piety; but to a scrupulous attention to either public or private duties of religion, from such motives as the Gospel inculcates, they are utter strangers. The truly gracious soul, on the contrary, cannot long subsist without secret prayer. It is true, there is not always an equal freedom and delight, a like enlargement and comfort in this duty; but yet he cannot be without it. He finds the want of his secret in his public



duties. If he has not met God in secret and had some communion with him in the morning, he sensibly perceives it in the deadness and unprofitableness of his heart and life all the day.\*

4. The *spirituality* of our duties is an important test of our sincerity. It is not enough that our employments and calling pertain to spiritual things, that our duties respect a holy God, or that we are conversant with holy things; but the frame of our heart must be spiritual. The most heavenly external duties will avail us nothing without a heavenly temper of soul. The end we aim at must be spiritual—the enjoyment of God and a growing conformity to him in holiness. There are times when God comes nigh to men in duty and sensibly fills their souls; when their minds are drawn away from earth and swallowed up in God and heavenly things. These are foretastes of glory which no man can describe to others as he himself feels them. Probably some real Christians are not conscious of joys to so high a degree; but they have no satis-

\* “It is the nature of true grace, that however it loves Christian society in its place, yet it in a peculiar manner delights in retirement and secret converse with God. So that if persons appear greatly engaged in social religion, and but little in the religion of the closet, and are often highly affected when with others, and but little moved when they have none but God and Christ to converse with, it looks very dark in respect to their religion.”

Edwards on Affections.

faction in duties wherein there is no intercourse between God and their souls.

5. If we would know whether men are Christians or mere pretenders to religion, we must inquire whether they are *assiduous* and *persevering* in the practice of piety. They whose religion is false, may at times make a show of engagedness and zeal—when danger threatens, they may pray vehemently; when religion is popular, they may be amongst the foremost to countenance it; but let danger disappear and their praying will cease; let persecution arise and they will leave those to endure it who love religion for its own sake; they attend to the forms of religion only when impelled by slavish fear, allured by deception, or incited by worldly interest. True religion, on the contrary, affords a permanent foundation in the saints, and furnishes powerful motives for assiduous constancy in the discharge of the various duties of piety. Whether dangers are apprehended or not, whether religion is popular or otherwise, whether their worldly interests are promoted or retarded by it, whether it procure favor or reproach, the saints will be holy still. They embraced religion for reasons which can be little affected by such things as these; they counted the cost, and are not disappointed; they have gained by religion what they can never lose; they still find in it sufficient to render the happiness it confers, and the

exercise of the duties it enjoins, their highest privilege and glory; they love religion now, and choose "always to abound in the work of the Lord;" the ways of piety are to them ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace; and they joyfully anticipate the entrance for which they are preparing to the world above, where they will be free from the obstructions by which they are here surrounded, and where religion will fully and eternally employ all their powers.\*

\* "Almost all that is said in the New Testament of men's watching, giving earnest heed to themselves, running the race that is set before them, striving and agonizing, wrestling not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers, fighting, putting on the whole armor of God, and standing, having done all, to stand, pressing forward, reaching forth, continuing instant in prayer, crying to God day and night; I say, almost all that is said in the New Testament of these things, is spoken of and directed to the saints. But, doubtless, there are some hypocrites that have only false affections, who will think they are able to stand this trial, and will readily say that they desire not to rest satisfied with past attainments, but to be pressing forward; that they do long after God and Christ, and desire more holiness, and do seek it. But the truth is, their desires are not properly the desires of appetite after holiness for its own sake, or for the moral excellency and holy sweetness that is in it, but only for mean and selfish ends. They long after clearer discoveries, that they may be better satisfied about the state of their souls, or because in great discoveries self is gratified in being made so much of by God, and so

6. The *humility and self-denial* of men's hearts when engaged in duty is closely connected with their true character. He who has Christian humility and self-denial will exercise it, especially when he approaches the presence of Almighty God. It will occasion in him the most reverential apprehensions of the Divine Majesty, the deepest self-abasement, and most hearty renunciation of all dependence on himself or his doings, and entire reliance on the blessed Mediator for acceptance.

7. Another consideration by which men's hearts may be tried is, whether in the discharge of duty they have *communion with God*. It is beyond contradiction that unsanctified men never have communion with God, they never have what in Scripture is so termed; and it is undeniable that the saints do realize what is meant by this phrase when they are engaged in the exercises of religion. This holy fellowship or communion is founded in real union to

much exalted above others; they long to taste the love of God, (as they call it,) more than to have more love to God. Or it may be, they have a kind of forced, fancied or made longings, because they think they must long for more grace, otherwise it will be a dark sign upon them. But such things as these are far different from the natural, and as it were necessary appetite and thirsting of the new man after God and holiness. There is an inward burning desire that a saint has after holiness, as natural to the new creature as vital heat is to the body."

the Lord Jesus Christ; is it enjoyed by those who have been brought nigh to God by reconciliation, and who draw near to him in duty; and if it cannot be adequately described to others, its reality, its present effects, and its blessedness are known to the people of God.

8. *Growth of grace in duties* is another distinguishing mark of sincerity. All the duties in the world will never make the hypocrite more holy, humble, or heavenly, than he is. What was Judas the better for all the sermons, prayers, and discourses of Christ which he heard? But as the saints have real communion with God in duties, so they make improvements answerable thereto. In their converse with God in the ways of his appointment, they grow more humble and heavenly.

9. *The assistance of the Holy Spirit in duties* evinces true grace. No vital sanctifying influences fall upon carnal men in duty. The Spirit helps not their infirmities, nor makes intercession for them with groanings that cannot be uttered, as he does for the people of God.

Let it be observed, that if some of these remarks, like such considerations as respect the spirituality of saints and their growth in grace, are true of some in a higher degree than of others, yet their universal application is safe, and they are as definite as the case requires.

**CHAPTER VIII.**

*Exhibiting the trials occasioned by SUFFERINGS on account of religion.*

**SECTION I.**

We are come to the last class of trials which was proposed for consideration. Thousands embark on the profession of religion in a calm, who, when the winds rise and the sea rages, and they see a storm gathering which threatens destruction, unless their carnal goods are thrown overboard, and their worldly expectations abandoned, forget the destined port, and desire to be landed as soon as may be upon the shore whence they departed. Thousands rank themselves with the saints, who, when tribulation or persecution arise, turn back and shrink from duty.

But since every degree of suffering for religion's sake is not sufficient to cause a separation of the vile from the precious, I shall show what trials of this nature may be deemed sufficient; why such must necessarily discover who has false religion, and what advantages true holiness has to endure them.

**SECTION II.**

The following instances are selected as being sufficiently severe to separate the dross from the gold:

1. When the dearest interests of men, which have

relation to this world, their lives, liberties, or fortunes, are put to imminent hazard on account of religion, few, except the genuine children of God, will maintain their *steadfastness*; and glory in the loss of all things else, rather than dishonor the name by which they are called, and incur the guilt of allowing any thing to have competition in their regard with the glory of God and their own eternal interests. In cases like this, false hearts will show themselves.

2. When there remains no hope of deliverance from such trials, nor any visible encouragement that the scene will vary, then the hands of the false-hearted hang down and their hearts faint.

3. When an unsanctified man is subjected to sufferings alone, it is a thousand to one but he quits religion to serve himself. Good company may encourage the irresolute and false-hearted, but they will faint and fail if called to sustain the fight single-handed; they lack those inward and invisible supports which uphold the saints in such circumstances.

4. When powerful temptations are combined with sufferings, with the desertion of friends and the opposition of relatives, then hypocrites and self-deceivers will leave religion and heaven to be maintained and enjoyed by the saints.

## SECTION III.

That these trials will distinguish true Christians from mere pretenders to religion may be easily made evident.

1. During such trials *the predominant interest* and attachment of men will be made manifest. No man can serve two masters whose injunctions clash with each other; he will in ordinary times secretly hold to the one and despise the other; and when his obedience and fidelity are put to the proof, he will openly show whom he serves. In these trials the two great interests of men, this world and heaven, the flesh and Christ, stand opposed; one must be adhered to, the other abandoned. Christ saith, "Be thou faithful unto death; he that loveth father or mother, wife or children, lands or inheritance, bodily ease, temporal safety, or life itself, more than me, is not worthy of me." The flesh saith, 'Spare thyself; he that will grieve and break the hearts of these dear relatives, forsake these earthly accommodations, exchange ease for sufferings, and hazard life, is not worthy of them.' Those, therefore, who love Christ supremely, will follow him wherever he leads, while the unholy will cleave to the world and the flesh.\*

\* "He that closes with religion only to serve a turn, will close with no more of it than he imagines will serve that tur



2. When brought to suffer for the kingdom of heaven's sake, the saints derive their supports, not from any visible or sensible objects, which would be utterly insufficient, but from an invisible source, from their covenant God, their Savior, their Sanctifier; which method of preservation the saints only have, and therefore they only can live through such trials.

3. In such times men's notions and speculations about religion, their visionary hopes and self-comforting imaginations vanish away, and those only who are rooted and grounded in the truth will remain steadfast.

4. These trials reach the foundations of men's faith and hope, and will demolish such as are laid in the sand, while such only as are built upon the Rock of Ages will abide their vehemence and pressure.\*

but he that closes with religion for its own excellent and lovely nature, closes with all that has that nature; he that embraces religion for its own sake, embraces the whole of religion. This shows why gracious affections will cause men to practise religion perseveringly and at all times."

*Edwards on Affections: 1*

\* "The holy Scriptures do abundantly place sincerity and soundness in religion in making a full choice of God as our only Lord and portion, forsaking all for him, and in a full determination of the will for God and Christ on counting the cost; in our hearts closing and complying with the religion of Jesus Christ, with all that belongs to it; embracing it with

## SECTION IV.

I proceed to show the advantages of true holiness, when sufferings on account of religion are to be endured.

1. Holiness takes the throne in the hearts of God's people, and destroys the dominion of selfishness; supreme love to God predominates and renders those interests which have the supreme regard of sinners subordinate; and thus they love that for which they suffer, while their sufferings tend to subdue propensities and attachments to which they are opposed.

2. By true holiness the affections of the saints are placed on heavenly and divine objects, they become heirs to an eternal and glorious inheritance, and are disposed to look, not at things which are seen and temporal, but at those which are unseen and eternal; hence they esteem the sufferings and tribulations with which they meet in the way to heaven, as light and unworthy to be compared with the end they have in view.

all its difficulties; as it were, hating our dearest earthly enjoyments, and even our own lives, for Christ; giving up ourselves, with all that we have, wholly and forever unto Christ, without keeping back any thing, or making any reserve; or, in one word, in the great duty of self-denial for Christ, as it were, disowning and renouncing ourselves for him, making ourselves nothing, that he may be all."

3. By holiness man's will is brought into cordial subjection to the will of God; and in the exercise of Christian submission the saints can patiently endure whatever sufferings, trials, or privations are allotted to them.

4. Holiness has all good beings and all goodness on its side; it has the support of the Redeemer's intercession, the prayers of the saints, the assistances of the Holy Spirit, the promises of God's word: therefore, 'neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor peril, nor sword,' shall be able to separate the saints from the love of Christ.

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## CHAPTER IX.

*Exhibiting* THE ENDS for which God appoints such trials of the holiness of his people in this world.

### SECTION I.

Some of the ways in which God brings the holiness of his people to the touchstone in this world, have been mentioned and illustrated; the design of these trials is now to be considered. Without doubt we may conclude, in general, that God designs to promote his own glory and the good of his people, both of which will certainly be accomplished; but, for our improvement, a more particular exhibition of the ends answered by these events is necessary.

## SECTION II.

If we take a near view of this subject, we shall perceive many important benefits arising from these trials of the sincerity and holiness of God's people.

1. *Hypocrisy is unmasked*, the vizard is plucked from the false professor, and his real character is displayed to the world. Should any object that this produces evil instead of good, that many are stumbled and hardened by it, and that the world observe its mischievous effects—I answer, that some are, indeed, thus prejudiced and rendered obdurate so as never afterward to think well of the government and people of God; but who does not see that his word and his purposes are thus accomplished? and if these stumble, and fall, and perish, yet others will be warned, awakened, and put to searching their hearts; and hence good will arise, “they who think they stand, will take heed lest they fall.” Again, by such disclosures of the corruption and danger of hypocrites and false professors, they themselves have better opportunities and greater advantages than they ever had before, to escape from the snare of the devil. Their refuges of lies are swept away, their illusions and pretences are dissipated, and they are rendered more accessible to truth, and more open to the conviction of conscience.

2. By these trials the *uprightness* of the saints is

manifested, their *doubts* are resolved, and their *fears* allayed. What would not many Christians give, what would they not suffer, what would they not gladly perform, if they might attain satisfaction in these respects! How many tears have they shed in secret, how many hours have they spent in the examination of their hearts, without being able to accomplish their object! But they find, at last, that trials are the high road to assurance; they have been cast into the furnace, and have come forth as gold purified in the fire; their holiness has been put to the test, and its reality demonstrated, not only to themselves, but to the world, who may now look upon the heavenly face of sincerity and truth, and see that true religion has the lustre and loveliness of immortal glory.\*

3. These trials are eminently calculated to subdue and destroy the remaining pride and self-confidence of the saints; who thus become more intimately acquainted with their hearts, and learn to detest what is evil, and to cherish what is good.

4. By trials, stupidity and slothfulness are pre-

\* "It is God's manner, in his providence, to bring trials on his professing friends and servants designedly, that he may manifest them, and may exhibit sufficient matter of conviction of the state which they are in to their own consciences, and oftentimes to the world, as appears by innumerable scriptures."

Edwards on the Affections.

vented, and grace is kept in exercise. The best men are apt, unless often visited by some trial, to slacken in their diligence and lose much of their fervor in religion.

5. When the graces of the saints are tried, Satan is put to shame and his malicious insinuations confuted. It is not uncommon for the devil and wicked men to charge the people of God with hypocrisy, and to persuade the world that they are not what they pretend to be; these suggestions and calumnies are overthrown by such trials as have been considered.

6. These trials exhibit living testimony against the infidelity of the world; they demonstrate that religion is no fancy, as the thoughtless and sensual would esteem it; that the engagedness of its professors is not blind bigotry and mistaken zeal; and that its doctrines and duties are not without efficacy, nor its effects destitute of high and lasting importance.\*

\* "Experience warrants and reason justifies and explains the assertion, that persecution generally tends to quicken the vigor and extend the prevalence of the opinions which the world would eradicate. For the peace of mankind, it has grown at length almost into an axiom, that "her devilish engine back recoils upon herself." Christianity especially has always thriven under persecution. At such a season she has no lukewarm professors, no adherents concerning whom it is

## CHAPTER X.

*Showing that that only is true holiness which will bear the trials that God appoints*

## SECTION I.

Before I confirm this truth, I will endeavor to prevent some mistakes which a misapprehension of it might occasion.

1. We ought not to think, because we are to be in a state of trial through life, and know not how we shall appear after future trials, that therefore assurance of our gracious state is *unattainable*. Rather let him that has been sustained hitherto, trust in God for victory in the trials which are to come. So

doubtful to what party they belong. The Christian is then reminded at every turn that his Master's kingdom is not of this world. When all on earth wears a black and threatening aspect, he looks up to heaven for consolation; he learns practically to consider himself as a pilgrim and stranger. He then cleaves to fundamentals, and examines well his foundation, as at the hour of death. When religion is in a state of external quiet and prosperity, the contrary of all this naturally takes place. The soldiers of the church militant then forget that they are in a state of warfare. Their ardor slackens, their zeal languishes. Like a colony long settled in a strange country, they are gradually assimilated in features, and demeanor, and language, to the native inhabitants, till at length almost every vestige of peculiarity dies away."

Wilberforce's View of Religion.

did the apostle: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us." Here is an assured triumph before the combat. "When he hath tried me," says Job, "I shall come forth as gold." This confidence of the gracious soul is founded, not merely on experience gained in former trials, but upon faith in the promises of God. He "is faithful, and will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but with every temptation will make a way to escape;" Add to all this, the constant, prevalent intercession of Christ in heaven for his people, and it will appear that the Christian need not deny himself the joy of assurance in view of anticipated trials.

2. Nor should it be imagined that any saint has so much holiness as to be able, *if left to himself*, to sustain these trials; though none will, by any means, be overcome by them. The most perfect creature, left to itself, will fall into ruin. This was exemplified in the angels that fell, and in Adam, though in a perfect state. Divine preservation is the prop which keeps the most holy from ruin. The best of men are but men at best. "Be strong in the Lord," says the apostle, "and in the power of his might."



## SECTION II.

I proceed to show, that such seeming graces as have never been tried, or will not bear trial, ought not to pass for genuine. They will neither comfort men now, nor fit them for heaven at last.

1. All is not gold that glitters. Great numbers of persons in the professing world are deceived and destroyed by trusting to mere apparent grace; they cannot determine that they have true holiness unless some trial be made of it, and if a trial be made which they cannot endure, the conclusion must be against them; hence they grope in uncertainty, and finally stumble where neither deliverance nor mitigation can reach them. Such was the miserable condition, and such, probably, was the fate of the Laodiceans mentioned in the text; they imagined themselves rich, but were, in truth, poor and wretched; their fancied gold had never been tried in the fire. Reader, pass not over this topic without some serious reflection in regard to your own spiritual state.

2. The promises of salvation are made to such holiness, such religion, as will endure trial: "Blessed is the man that *endureth* temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which God hath promised to them that love him."

Not to him who sets out in the morning with resolution and gallantry, but to him who holds out till

the evening of life, does the promise apply, "He that *endureth to the end* shall be saved." Hence, if any who have sustained slight troubles shall afterward faint and fail under severe trials, all their labors and their hopes will prove vain.

3. Every man's character must be scrutinized at the final judgment; and if those who pretend to religion cannot endure the trials to which they are now exposed, how can they bear the investigation to which they will then be subjected? Surely, if we have not such holiness as will bear the severest tests to which it can be brought in this life, we can hardly hope it will sustain the ordeal of the last day. If we cannot bear these lighter trials; if a little prosperity, or a light stroke of adversity discover so much falsehood, pride, and selfishness in the heart; if we cannot resist temptation, but yield ourselves servants to sin; if we can neither keep our hearts with God in duties, nor mourn for our wanderings from him; if a few scoffs from wicked tongues, or trials of persecution from the hands of men cause us to faint in the way, and turn back from following the Lord—what shall we do when He comes, "whose fan is in his hand, and who will thoroughly purge his floor," and who will "try every man's work," as by fire, "of what sort it is?"

4. True holiness is willing to be tried. True saints greatly desire to know their condition, and

choose to be searched and proved ; but false religion strives to avoid the touchstone, and shrinks from scrutiny. Saints wish to know the truth respecting themselves, whatever it may be, while those who prefer that their supposed grace should not be tried, are secretly conscious of its falseness and of their insincerity.

O professor, if thy heart be right, thou wilt wish to know the worst of thyself ; and when thou hast made the deepest search, thou wilt still fear thou hast not been severe enough ; nothing will give thee more content than when thou feelest the word dividing thy soul and spirit, thy joints and marrow ; nothing so much comforts thee under affliction as the discovery it makes of thy heart. Thou wilt seem to feel with what affection those words fell from the prophet's lips : "Thou, O Lord, knowest me, thou hast seen me, and tried my heart toward thee." O what refreshing sweetness will stream through thy soul, when thou canst make the like appeal to God, and with like sincerity ! And surely, with no such willingness to have your graces tried, you can have little evidence that they are genuine.

## CHAPTER XI

*Containing various INFERENCES from the subject, and persuasions to self-examination.*

## SECTION I.

1. God has appointed so many trials of our sincerity, let no man indulge the hope that his hypocrisy *can long lie concealed*. Ah! there is no darkness nor shadow of death that can conceal the hypocrite. Oftentimes God discovers him by the trials he appoints in this world; but there will be a day when God will strip him naked before the great assembly of angels and men, and all shall gaze on him and say, "Lo! this is the man that made not God his hope. This is he that wore a garment of profession to deceive; but God has now stripped him out of it, and all men see what he is." Away then with hypocrisy! Be honest and hearty in religion; otherwise confusion of face shall be your recompense from the Lord.

2. In view of what has been said, be guarded against *too much confidence* of your good estate. Your period of trial has not expired; "you have not resisted unto blood, striving against sin; be not high-minded, but fear."\*

\* "Many persons, as was formerly hinted, are misled by the favorable opinions entertained of them by others; many,

3. If true holiness must be tried, even in this world, as gold is tried in the fire, then it greatly concerns all, at their setting out, to build upon the *sure foundation*, and to anticipate severe trials. If any have not done this, it behoves them to do it now. I warn you, reader, to count the cost before you attempt to build; to the test you must come, and by truth you must be judged; if you hope to *endure to the end*, you must have the spirit of a martyr.

4. It may be observed in view of this subject, that scandals and offences, in connection with religion, are unavoidable. "It must needs be that offences come," for all who are exposed to trials will not be able to bear them, some therefore will be offended; but the holy God will accomplish his ends, both in them that are saved and in them that perish.

On the whole, true saints have abundant reason to be encouraged; but hypocrites and self-deceivers may well be dismayed, for if they are not exposed in this life, they are sure to be hereafter.

it is to be feared, mistake zeal for orthodoxy, for a cordial acceptance of the great truths of the Gospel; and almost all of us, at one time or other, are more or less misled by confounding the suggestions of the understanding with the impulses of the will, the assent which our judgment gives to religious and moral truths. with a hearty belief and approbation of them."

Wilberforce's View.

## SECTION II.

If men must be tried as gold is tried in the fire, then it is of great importance that they should examine and prove themselves; and it cannot be unsuitable to urge this duty by some pressing considerations.

1. The *difficulty* of this work ought to excite you to undertake it in earnest. Who finds it not hard to persuade his heart to such a work as this? Nature declines it. Flesh and blood relish it not. It is no easy thing to bring a man and his own heart together. I fear there are many professors of religion who can spend day after day in hearing and talking of fruitless controversies, that never spend one day in determining whether they are the servants of God or of the world; whether they are on the way to heaven or hell. Yea, I doubt not many sinful hours are spent in prying into, reporting, and censuring the failings of others, while not one hour is faithfully employed in judging their own hearts before the Lord. O, men had rather be about any work than this; there is no pleasure in it to the flesh!

And difficult as it is to bring our hearts to this work, it is still more difficult to bring the great question of our sincerity to a clear result and *issue*. O how many upright hearts have lifted up cries to heaven, and shed secret and undissembled tears, and

still are in the dark, perplexed and filled with fear as to the real state of their souls! Defer not the work, therefore, if you would attain well-founded peace, and avoid final shame and perdition.

2. The discovery of sincerity and holiness, after a faithful examination, will abundantly *reward* you for your pains. You will never regret that you have prayed and mourned, that you have trembled and feared, that you have searched and tried your own heart; nay, you will never repent of it, that God has tried you by sharp afflictions and deep sufferings, if your sincerity be but thereby made fully to appear. You may then go to the promises boldly, take Christ into the arms of your faith, and say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." O what blessedness to the soul, when a man sees what he is, and what he has in Christ and the promises, and what he has to do!

3. The vast interest of your soul in this matter ought to awaken you to the utmost *diligence* in examining yourself. Your eternal happiness stands or falls with your sincerity. Bring your heart then to the trial; your thoughts cannot be occupied on a more momentous subject; a portion of your time cannot be employed to better purpose; a business more worthy of your closest attention cannot be named.

4. Consider that it is to your highest advantage to be thoroughly tried, whatever the result may be.

If you be found sincere, you are richly rewarded for all your labor. If you find the contrary, the discovery may be of unspeakable benefit to your soul. Your vain confidence being destroyed, you are open to the deep and effectual conviction of your sin and misery; and till you come to open your heart to this conviction, and give up your false refuges, there is no hope of you. Christ assured the hypocritical Pharisees, that publicans and harlots were in a fairer way for heaven than they, because conviction had easier access to their consciences. I may say of your groundless hopes, as Christ to the officers who came to seize him: "*If ye seek me, let these go their way.*" It is your happiness to have every false confidence stripped off, and your nakedness and poverty discovered, that you may thus be led to Christ and made rich in him.

5. Remember, that whether prepared or unprepared, whether a saint or a sinner, you must ere long stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and be approved or condemned. Therefore, examine and prove yourself now, and be willing that God should try you as he pleases in this world, that confusion and wo may not overwhelm you at last.



## CHAPTER XII.

*Various helps for discovering sincerity and detecting hypocrisy.*

## SECTION I.

I shall venture here to offer some observations which may assist to the *discovery of sincerity*.

1. Every true reason of humiliation for sin is not a proper cause of *doubt* whether we have genuine holiness or not. It is the unhappiness and the sin of some, to construe every thing unfavorably to themselves; they judge not candidly, and therefore cannot expect the comforts which piety confers.

2. That our temptations from some besetting *sins* are greater than from others, does not prove our insincerity. Every hypocrite has some way of wickedness, some sin that he delights in, some lust that he does not subdue; and the true Christian may be tempted more powerfully by some sins than others, but he allows himself in none. The frequent assaults of such sins, if they are not indulged, but guarded against with double scrutiny, are no proof of hypocrisy.

3. A greater reluctance to some particular *duties* than to others does not prove our insincerity, provided we mourn over that reluctance, and in heart desire to perform all our duty. It is indeed a very dangerous sign of hypocrisy that a man's zeal runs

in one channel of obedience only, and he has not respect to *all* God's commandments; but while the soul heartily approves all the will of God, and sincerely desires to come up to it, and mourns for its deadness in this or that duty, and by prayer obtains grace from God to overcome this reluctance, it is not a proof of hypocrisy.

4. The doubts and fears which we indulge concerning the unsoundness of our hearts, do not prove that we are destitute of holiness. Saints who are free from doubts and fears are rarely to be met with.

#### SECTION II.

Let him who would ascertain the state of his heart examine it impartially, remembering that for the smallest, as well as for the greatest manifestations of sanctifying grace, God must be praised. It may be of advantage occasionally to propose to ourselves *questions* like the following:

1. Do I seek the approbation of God, or the applause of men, in my religious performances and duties? Can I be satisfied with the mere approbation of men, when I have no good evidence of acceptance with God?

2. Is it the reproach and shame which attend sin at present, or the misery which will follow it hereafter, or is it love to God and hatred of sin that restrains me from the commission of it?

3. Do I heartily rejoice to see God's work carried on in the world, and his glory promoted by the instrumentality of others, though the honor and the benefits of it result not to me?

4. Is there no duty so difficult or self-denying but I desire to perform it when required; and is all the holy and good will of God acceptable to my soul, though I have not risen up with like alacrity to the performance of all duties?

5. Am I resolved to follow Christ, and practise holiness at all times and in all events; or do I shun all hazards for religion; having a secret reserve in my heart, to go no further than I can with safety to my ease and honor in the world?

6. Am I rigidly conscientious in abstaining from secret sins, and in performing secret duties?

Such questions, proposed in a calm and serious hour, can hardly fail to reach the heart, and discover whether it is truly devoted to God.

### SECTION III.

As the upright and sincere are apt to apply to themselves the characteristics of hypocrites or self-deceivers, so these, on the contrary, are eager to appropriate to themselves the graces and expectations of saints. Some remarks must therefore be made to discover *their ruinous mistakes.*

1. It is not enough to clear a man from self-deception, that he does not know himself to be deceived. Doubtless, many are deceived, and will finally perish, who are not now sensible of their state, because they have never seriously examined it.

2. Zeal and forwardness in the cause of God will not clear a man from the danger of hypocrisy. Jehu was a zealous reformer, but yet a painted sepulchre. It is related by John Wolfe, that in 1549 reformation became so much in repute among the nobles in Germany, that many of them caused the five letters, V. D. M. I. Æ., being the initials of the words *Verbum Domini manet in æternum*, "The word of the Lord abideth for ever," to be embroidered or set in plates upon their cloaks or the sleeves of their garments, to show to all the world, that, forsaking Popish traditions, they would now cleave to the pure doctrine and discipline of the eternal word. Had it been graven on their hearts, they might have done so, but, *Come, see my zeal, mars all.*

3. A man may be deceived himself, though he hates hypocrisy in another. As one proud or covetous man may hate another who is guilty of the same sin as himself, so a hypocrite may loathe that in another which he allows in himself. Nay, it is the policy of some to declaim against the hypocrisy of others, thereby to hide their own. Hypocrites are not the most modest censurers of others.

4. The external performance of private duties does not prove a man to be sincere. The influence of education, or support of reputation, or the impulse of a convinced conscience, may drive a man to the duty, while his heart is not drawn thither by any hungering and thirsting after God. It is not always the external performance that distinguishes sound and unsound professors; but the motives, designs, and ends of the soul in these duties.

5. The reputation which a man's piety may have gained among Christians will by no means prove that he does not deceive himself—he may have a name to live while dead; nor will the respect which he may show to the servants of God avail—this may spring from selfish and unholy motives.\*

\* “Nothing can be certainly concluded concerning the nature of the religious affections from this, that the outward manifestation of them, and the relation persons give of them, are very affecting and pleasing to the truly godly, and such as greatly gain their charity and win their hearts.

“The true saints have not such a spirit of discerning, that they can certainly determine who are godly and who are not; for though they know experimentally what true religion is in the internal exercises of it, yet these are what they can neither feel nor see in the heart of another. There is nothing in others that comes within their view, but outward manifestations and appearances; but the Scripture plainly intimates that this way of judging what is in men by outward appearances, is at best uncertain and liable to deceit. 1 Sam. 16 : 7. Isa. 11 : 3.”

## SECTION IV.

Would you know the real state of your heart, let such *questions* as the following be often pressed upon the conscience.

When I attempt to perform any duties toward God, is my heart engaged in them, or do I go a heedless round of external duties?

Am I not influenced by self-interest, worldly advantage, reputation, or ease, in my religious proceedings?

Have I not made some secret reserve in my professed consecration to God? Certainly if there be any sin that I cannot part with, any suffering for Christ which I resolve against in my heart, I am not his disciple; my heart is not right with God.

Do I make conscience of secret sins? Do I mourn for a vain heart, wandering thoughts, spiritual deadness? Do I conscientiously abstain from secret sins, when there is no danger of discovery or forfeiting my reputation? Is it God's eye, or man's, that drives me from the commission of sin?

## SECTION V.

I have only to add some *advice* to such as may read this treatise.

1. Let it be your great object to have a *holy heart*,

a renewed and right spirit. All helps and directions will not preserve you from delusion and ruin, unless your heart is sanctified. Pray, therefore, with David, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed."

2. Always suspect and examine your *ends* in what you do. As your aim and design are, so are you. The intentions of the heart lie deep. The same action, done with a holy end, may be acceptable to God, which, done with a corrupt design, he would abhor. A man of God, who was commended for a good action, replied, "The work indeed is good, but I distrust the motives. Selfishness is liable to insinuate itself into the best actions."

3. Regard hypocrisy as the *most odious sin* in the sight of God and men. To have no holiness is bad enough; but to pretend it when we have it not, is double impiety. To make religion a mere step to preferment and a covert to wickedness—O how vile a thing is it! God made Christ a sacrifice for sin, and the hypocrite makes him a cloak for sin.

4. Let it be your constant endeavor to *mortify those lusts that breed hypocrisy*. Pride, vain glory, self-love, a worldly heart, are the seeds from which this cursed plant springs up in the souls of men. Dig but to the root, and you shall certainly find these unholy passions; and till the Lord help you to mortify them, hypocrisy will spring up in all your duties.

5. Listen to the voice of *conscience* in sickness and trouble. Mark its upbraidings at such times, whether they be that you are indulging some secret sin, or neglecting some known duty. These upbraidings of conscience will designate the corruptions in which, probably, most lies your danger.

6. Away with all *temporizing* in religion; be a Christian at heart, faithful to your Master and true to yourself. Hold fast integrity, whatever else you lose by it. O let this always be your rejoicing, which was Paul's, "the testimony of your conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, you have had your conversation in the world." Let your daily prayer and cry to God be that of David, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on thee."

7. Keep your heart always under the *awe of God's all-seeing eye*. Remember he beholds all your ways, and ponders all your thoughts; he will bring *every secret thing into judgment*. Thus did Job, and it preserved him. Thus did David, and it preserved him. Thus do thou also, and it will preserve thee blameless and without guile to the day of Christ.













